



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

[The page contains extremely faint, illegible text, likely bleed-through from the reverse side. The text is organized into several paragraphs, with some lines appearing as bold or indented. Due to the low contrast, specific words and sentences cannot be transcribed.]

37.

501.

By the same Author,

I.

The **FIRST SERIES** of the **YOUNG CHRISTIAN'S SUNDAY EVENING** : containing Conversations on the **OLD TESTAMENT**.
Second Edition. 8s. 6d.

II.

The **INFANT CHRISTIAN'S FIRST CATECHISM**, intended for the Instruction of Children from three to five years old. *Third Edition.* Price 3d. or 2s. 6d. per dozen.

EXPOSITIONS of SCRIPTURE

BY THE

REV. ARCHDEACON PARRY.

1. A **PRACTICAL EXPOSITION** of the **EPISTLE** to the **ROMANS** ; in a Series of Lectures. 12mo. 7s.

2. **PAUL, PHILEMON, and ONESIMUS** ; or, **CHRISTIAN BROTHERHOOD** : being a **PRACTICAL EXPOSITION** of the **EPISTLE** to **PHILEMON**. 12mo. 2s.

3. The **APOSTLESHIP** and **PRIESTHOOD** of **CHRIST** : being a **PRACTICAL EXPOSITION** of the **EPISTLE** to the **HEBREWS**. 12mo. 6s. 6d.

Also,

PAROCHIAL SERMONS. 8vo. 10s. 6d.

BY **THOMAS PARRY, M.A.**

Archdeacon of Barbados, (late of Antigua,) and formerly
Fellow of Balliol College, Oxford.

THE YOUNG CHRISTIAN'S

SUNDAY EVENING:

OR,

CONVERSATIONS ON SCRIPTURE HISTORY.



SECOND SERIES:

ON THE FOUR GOSPELS.

BY

MRS. PARRY,

AUTHOR OF "THE INFANT CHRISTIAN'S FIRST CATECHISM."

True image of the Father: whether throned
In the bosom of bliss, and light of light
Conceiving, or remote from heaven, enshrined
In fleshly tabernacle and human form,
Wandering the wilderness; whatever place,
Habit, or state, or motion, still expressing
The Son of God. MILTON.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR J. G. & F. RIVINGTON,

ST. PAUL'S CHURCH YARD,
AND WATERLOO PLACE, FALL MALL.

1837.

501.

L O N D O N :
GILBERT & RIVINGTON, PRINTERS,
ST. JOHN'S SQUARE.

TO
LADY RICHARDSON,
AS TO ONE WHOM THE AUTHOR HAS LEARNED,
FROM HER EARLIEST YEARS,
TO LOVE AND RESPECT ;
AND ON WHOSE FAVOURABLE OPINION,
AND KIND INTEREST IN HER PRESENT UNDERTAKING,
SHE SETS NO COMMON VALUE,
THE SECOND PART OF THIS LITTLE WORK
IS INSCRIBED
BY HER EVER AFFECTIONATE AND OBLIGED,

L. P.

P R E F A C E.

THE nature and object of this attempt to familiarise and illustrate the Sacred History have been already explained in the Preface to the First Series; and the same opportunity was taken of gratefully acknowledging that general assistance from Commentators and other Biblical writers, to which a work of this kind must of necessity be indebted, even though, as in the present instance, disclaiming altogether the character of a *Compilation*. A more particular acknowledgment is required of the valuable aid received from *Mimpriss's* English Edition of *Greswell's Harmony*, which has been much used, though not implicitly adopted, in the Chronology and general arrangement.

In the more critical parts, help has often been given by a very near and dear relative, from whom the Author is unwilling to withhold her affectionate ac-

knowledgments ; especially as the circumstance alluded to may render the volume far more acceptable to the Parent or Teacher, to whom she has been anxious to make it, under the Divine blessing, an useful assistant in the work of Christian Education.

September 27th, 1837.

CONTENTS.

FIRST SUNDAY EVENING.

	PAGE
Preparation for the Coming of the Saviour.....	1

SECOND SUNDAY EVENING.

The Saviour born at Bethlehem.....	14
------------------------------------	----

THIRD SUNDAY EVENING.

Angels announce the Saviour.....	27
----------------------------------	----

FOURTH SUNDAY EVENING.

Jews and Gentiles rejoicing in Christ.....	36
--	----

FIFTH SUNDAY EVENING.

The Infants at Bethlehem.....	50
-------------------------------	----

SIXTH SUNDAY EVENING.

The childhood of Jesus.....	55
-----------------------------	----

SEVENTH SUNDAY EVENING.

John preaching in the Wilderness.....	62
---------------------------------------	----

EIGHTH SUNDAY EVENING.

Our Lord tempted in the Wilderness.....	75
---	----

NINTH SUNDAY EVENING.

Beginning of Miracles.....	94
----------------------------	----

TENTH SUNDAY EVENING.

Public Opening of our Lord's Ministry at Jerusalem.....	110
---	-----

ELEVENTH SUNDAY EVENING.

Nicodemus comes to Jesus by Night.....	119
--	-----

TWELFTH SUNDAY EVENING.

Christ returns through Samaria.....	129
-------------------------------------	-----

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY EVENING.

	PAGE
The Woman of Samaria.....	136

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY EVENING.

The Nobleman of Capernaum	149
---------------------------------	-----

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY EVENING.

Christ preaching in Galilee	158
-----------------------------------	-----

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY EVENING.

The Mount of Beatitudes	168
-------------------------------	-----

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY EVENING.

Miraculous Draught of fishes.....	178
-----------------------------------	-----

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY EVENING.

The Leper cleansed	183
--------------------------	-----

NINETEENTH SUNDAY EVENING.

The Paralytic cured.....	190
--------------------------	-----

TWENTIETH SUNDAY EVENING.

The Call of St. Matthew	197
-------------------------------	-----

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY EVENING.

The Pool of Bethesda.....	208
---------------------------	-----

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY EVENING.

The Twelve Apostles.....	223
--------------------------	-----

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY EVENING.

The believing Centurion.....	229
------------------------------	-----

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY EVENING.

The Widow of Nain.....	236
------------------------	-----

TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY EVENING.

The Messengers of John.....	247
-----------------------------	-----

TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY EVENING.

The Feet of Jesus washed with tears	255
---	-----

TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY EVENING.

The family of Christ.....	267
---------------------------	-----

TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY EVENING.

	PAGE
Christ speaking in Parables	276

TWENTY-NINTH SUNDAY EVENING.

Parables explained	286
--------------------------	-----

THIRTIETH SUNDAY EVENING.

Miracles on the Lake, in Decapolis, and Capernaum.....	297
--	-----

THIRTY-FIRST SUNDAY EVENING.

The Gospel preached through the Towns of Galilee.....	307
---	-----

THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY EVENING.

Bread from Heaven.....	319
------------------------	-----

THIRTY-THIRD SUNDAY EVENING.

The Traditions of the Pharisees.....	334
--------------------------------------	-----

THIRTY-FOURTH SUNDAY EVENING.

The Woman of Canaan.....	343
--------------------------	-----

THIRTY-FIFTH SUNDAY EVENING.

Faith and Frailty of St. Peter.....	359
-------------------------------------	-----

THIRTY-SIXTH SUNDAY EVENING.

The Transfiguration.	368
---------------------------	-----

THIRTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY EVENING.

Resurrection of Lazarus.....	382
------------------------------	-----

THIRTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY EVENING.

The good Samaritan.	395
--------------------------	-----

THIRTY-NINTH SUNDAY EVENING.

Christ the Guest of His creatures.....	404
--	-----

FORTIETH SUNDAY EVENING.

Recovery of the Lost.....	413
---------------------------	-----

FORTY-FIRST SUNDAY EVENING.

Danger of Riches.....	424
-----------------------	-----

FORTY-SECOND SUNDAY EVENING.

Christ's last Journey to Jerusalem.....	432
---	-----

FORTY-THIRD SUNDAY EVENING.

Christ's last Journey, (<i>continued</i>).....	443
--	-----

FORTY-FOURTH SUNDAY EVENING.

	PAGE
Christ at Bethany, anointed by Mary.....	454

FORTY-FIFTH SUNDAY EVENING.

Christ's public Entry into Jerusalem.....	463
---	-----

FORTY-SIXTH SUNDAY EVENING.

Farther particulars of the Passion Week.....	476
--	-----

FORTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY EVENING.

Christ teaching in the Temple.....	486
------------------------------------	-----

FORTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY EVENING.

Christ taking a final leave of Jerusalem.....	497
---	-----

FORTY-NINTH SUNDAY EVENING.

Judgment of Jerusalem.....	505
----------------------------	-----

FIFTIETH SUNDAY EVENING.

Judgment of Jerusalem, (<i>continued.</i>).....	516
---	-----

FIFTY-FIRST SUNDAY EVENING.

The final Judgment.....	529
-------------------------	-----

FIFTY-SECOND SUNDAY EVENING.

The Last Supper.....	539
----------------------	-----

FIFTY-THIRD SUNDAY EVENING.

The Supper Chamber,—the Garden of Gethsemane.....	547
---	-----

FIFTY-FOURTH SUNDAY EVENING.

Christ condemned by the Jewish Council.....	552
---	-----

FIFTY-FIFTH SUNDAY EVENING.

Christ before Pilate.....	572
---------------------------	-----

FIFTY-SIXTH SUNDAY EVENING.

The Crucifixion.....	583
----------------------	-----

FIFTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY EVENING.

The Burial.....	600
-----------------	-----

FIFTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY EVENING.

The Resurrection.....	610
-----------------------	-----

FIFTY-NINTH SUNDAY EVENING.

The Ascension.....	622
--------------------	-----

THE
YOUNG CHRISTIAN'S
SUNDAY EVENING.

FIRST SUNDAY EVENING.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE COMING OF THE SAVIOUR.

MAMMA. It is now some time, Edward, since we have had any conversations on the subject of Sacred History. Should you like me to renew them with you on a Sunday evening?

EDWARD. Indeed I should, Mamma; for I want you very much to assist me in understanding the New Testament.

M. I am most willing and anxious to lend you my help here, as I did in the Old Testament; for important as that is, we cannot hesitate to call the history which the Gospels contain still more so. When we left off our conversations on the former, I told you that the promise of the Redeemer was the chief and distinguishing privilege of God's people in old time, even from the very fall of our first parents. The patriarchs looked anxiously for Him; to Him the law and the prophets bare witness. Indeed from the earliest ages of the world, preparations were made for

[*Second Series.*]

our Lord Jesus Christ; for what in fact is the world without Him? For who is Christ, and for what purpose was He to come? St. John in the first chapter of his Gospel, will answer this question. He tells us that Christ, whom he calls the WORD, was in the beginning with God, nay that He was Himself the great and glorious God, and that by Him all things were made, and without Him was not any thing made that was made; no, not even one, from the highest archangel to the meanest worm. Most meet was it that for so great and mighty a Saviour, preparations should be made long before. He was the Deliverer promised to Adam and Eve; the blessing held out to Abraham; the great Prophet of whom Moses wrote; the end to which the law pointed in almost all its ordinances. It was expressly to pave the way for Christ, that the Jews were separated from the rest of mankind, and set apart as God's peculiar people, and of Him it was that their prophets continually spoke.

But prophecy had now, for four hundred years, been silent. After Malachi, no prophets appeared to keep the people of God in mind of the promised Messiah or Christ. It pleased God however, when the coming of our Lord drew nigh, to send before Him a greater messenger than any of the prophets had been; one who should speak of Christ still more clearly than they did; who should plainly declare Him as the Son of the Highest, and directly point to Him as the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.

E. But, Mamma, you have passed over four hundred years of the *history*: does not the Bible tell us

what happened to the Church and people of God in all that time ?

M. No, Edward ; not only did prophecy become silent after Malachi, but the sacred history pauses then, and no more lifts up its voice until it has to announce to the world the joyful news of the Saviour's approach. The Bible is altogether a sacred volume ; the word of God uses history only as subservient to religion.

E. But, dear Mamma, could you not just tell me in a few words what became of the Jews in those four hundred years ? They were restored I know to their own land ; their city and their temple were rebuilt ; but were they never again carried into captivity, or did they become their own masters, and live under their own laws ?

M. At the time of which you are speaking, they were, you will remember, under the dominion of the kings of Persia, of whose empire Judea formed a part. Under the Persian dominion they continued for about eighty years longer, until the time of Alexander the Great, king of Macedon, so famous in history for his rapid and extensive conquests, first in Greece, and then in Asia. He was the founder of the third great monarchy or kingdom which was to be in the world, as foretold in the prophecies of Daniel.

When the empire of Alexander was divided (as upon his death it was) into four parts, the Jews became subjects of the kings of Egypt ; then of the kings of Syria. After this, they were sometime independent of foreign rule, and governed by princes of their own, till the Romans conquered them and made them tributary to themselves ; still allowing

them to have a king, but a king who was obliged to obey them. In this state the Jews were, Herod the Great as he is called being the king set over them by the Romans, when the time approached for the appearance among them of Christ the Saviour of men.

E. And John the Baptist was the prophet I suppose of whom you were speaking just now?

M. You are quite right; John the Baptist is that distinguished messenger, whom God sent before the face of His Son to prepare His way: and before we enter upon the history of our Lord Himself, it will be necessary to give you some account of this extraordinary servant of God, who was chosen to be the herald or immediate forerunner of our great Redeemer. So important was the office of the Baptist, that we find him made directly a subject of prophecy. The prophet Malachi foretold his preaching, and an angel was sent from heaven to announce his birth.

E. Who were the parents of John the Baptist?

M. The name of his father was Zacharias; his mother was called Elizabeth. We have a most interesting account of them in the Gospel by St. Luke. There we learn that Zacharias was one of the priests of the Temple, taking his turn among the rest in performing the different services of that holy place. His wife Elizabeth was also descended from the family of Aaron. But the parents of John were not only distinguished by their holy descent, born among those who were particularly set apart for the service of God; what was of far more importance, they were themselves eminently holy persons; and their names are highly honoured in the word of God; they are there recorded as having been "both righteous before God,

walking in all the ordinances and commandments of the Lord blameless,"—remarkable before men for their pious and irreproachable lives—sincerely righteous in the sight of that God, who searches the inmost recesses of the heart.

E. Had they any children before John the Baptist?

M. No; they had lived long together childless, regretting perhaps that God had seen fit to withhold from them so great a blessing, though no doubt satisfied that what He did, was best. You may remember my telling you before, that religious persons among the Jews were always very anxious to have children of their own; because each had some faint expectation of being the earthly parent of the Redeemer of the world; all hoped that so high an honour might be intended either for them or for their children. Zacharias and Elizabeth, however, had grown old, and had ceased to be anxious upon the subject, little thinking that God intended to make their old age far more honoured and happy than their youth.

Zacharias was one day engaged as usual in his sacred business in the Temple, burning incense in the sanctuary or holy place, while the people were assembled in great numbers without, in what was called the court of Israel, each offering up their own prayers in silence to God. This was the moment which God had chosen for making known His gracious purpose to Zacharias. Behold! whilst he, as a priest, is offering incense before God, and interceding for the people, and praying perhaps for the speedy appearance of the Messiah, who was to be the consolation of Israel, "there appeared unto him an angel of the

Lord, standing on the right side of the altar of Incense."

E. An angel ! It is a long time since we have heard of an angel being sent to the Jews.

M. Yes ; in those days such extraordinary messengers from God were not common. Many and many a year had passed since even a prophet had appeared ; well then might Zacharias be uneasy at so strange a sight ! We do not wonder when we are told that, "he was troubled and fear fell upon him." But this was no messenger of terror—it was a minister of mercy, sent with welcome news. The angel said unto him, "Fear not Zacharias, for thy prayer is heard, and thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John, and thou shalt have joy and gladness, and many shall rejoice at his birth."

E. What delightful news for Zacharias ! I suppose he made haste home to tell his wife ?

M. You will be surprised to hear how he received the message. We should have expected that he would have fallen at the feet of the angel to acknowledge the great goodness of God towards him. Knowing that, from his holy character and office, he must have been well acquainted with the prophecies of Malachi respecting this very event, we are greatly surprised when we find that Zacharias could not believe the words of the angel. His only answer was, "Whereby shall I know this ? for I am an old man and my wife well-stricken in years." Had the angel merely told him that it had pleased God to give him a child in his old age, he might even then have been expected to believe ; but when the heavenly messenger informed

him so clearly of the purpose for which this child was to be sent; that he was to be great in the sight of the Lord, and to be filled with the Holy Ghost even from his birth; that he was to turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and to be so excellent a prophet as to be compared to none but Elijah, and greater even than he, inasmuch as he was to be the immediate messenger of the Christ;—when the angel had condescended to tell all this, the sin of his unbelief became very great, and in a person like Zacharias very surprising. That it was offensive in the sight of God we have no doubt, from the punishment which immediately followed. For when the angel found that his words were not believed, he made Zacharias this solemn answer: “I am Gabriel that stand in the presence of God, and am sent to speak unto thee, and to show thee these glad tidings, and behold thou shalt be dumb and unable to speak until the day that these things shall be performed.” How great must have been the shame of Zacharias when he heard these words, in which his offence and its punishment were so plainly declared! Had the Almighty sent one of the meanest of His prophets or servants to make known His purpose, the message should have been received with reverence, humility, and faith. But it was no prophet that was now employed, nor yet a common angel; but one of the highest order of those glorious beings, even the angel Gabriel, whose place in heaven is among the most exalted of the angels, among them who stand the nearest to the throne of God. When Zacharias thought of all this, he must have been deeply humbled, and ready to acknowledge that he deserved the punish-

ment which was to follow his unbelief. The guilty tongue, by which he had offended, was to lose its powers, until the event of which he had doubted should be brought to pass.

E. And did he really lose the power of speaking?

M. Yes, he was struck dumb by the angel of the Lord, the very moment that the word was spoken; and when he came out of the temple, he could not speak to the people, but remained speechless, until the time was come when the child of whom the angel had spoken was born. Month after month passed by, and still Zacharias was dumb; but at length the happy time arrived when Elizabeth became a mother. Her promised son was born: her neighbours and her friends came to rejoice with her at the goodness of the Lord, and the voice of joy and gladness was heard within that dwelling, where a sad silence had so long prevailed. But there was one sound still wanting to complete the happiness of that joyful party. The father's voice did not yet mingle with the rest. The tedious time in which he had kept silence, was not yet completed. His tongue was not unloosed at the very moment of the birth; he saw and embraced his child, but he could not speak to welcome it. One more trial of his faith was he to bear, before his speech should be restored to him; that he might have an opportunity of showing that he had not suffered so much in vain.

Eight days passed by, and the relatives and friends of the family collected to be present at the circumcision and naming of the child, according to the custom of the Jews. Circumcision among the Jews was something like what baptism is to us: it was the

ordinance by which they gave or dedicated their infant children to the service of God. And now it became necessary that Elizabeth's infant son should receive the name by which it was hereafter to be called, and her friends endeavoured to persuade her to name it Zacharias after its father. But the mother who had learnt from her husband the message of the angel, replied, "Not so; but he shall be called John." Her friends reminded her that there was, no such name in her family, and they made signs to the father that he should tell them what he wished the child to be called. Then Zacharias called for a writing table and wrote saying, "His name is John,"—the name which the angel had told him. And immediately his mouth was opened, his tongue was loosed, and he spake and praised God. The loss of his speech had been altogether miraculous; and so also was the restoration of it. The hand of God was manifest in both; and by giving back to Zacharias his speech just at this moment, in the midst of his assembled relations, God bore evident witness to the truth of that prediction concerning Christ, to which he was now by the inspiration of God to give utterance. For scarcely had he recovered the use of his lips, when his full heart burst forth in a sublime hymn of praise and prophecy, in which he adored the goodness of the Lord God of Israel in visiting and redeeming His people, and raising up salvation for them in the house of David, in the person of that Saviour, who had been spoken of by the holy prophets ever since the world began, and promised to the patriarchs even from the faithful Abraham. In this holy song too, he rejoiced in the goodness of God which had chosen

him, unworthy as he was, to be parent of the child, who was now sent to be the prophet or messenger of the Highest, to go before the face of his glorious Lord, to prepare his way ; to make known to those who were still sitting in the darkness and shadow of death, the great and joyful tidings, that the dayspring from on high was coming to guide their feet into the way of peace. What a joyful declaration was this of the approaching redemption of Israel ; the mighty salvation which God was raising up for them in the house of David ; the fulfilment of those glorious prophecies which related to the seed of Abraham. Words seemed to fail Zacharias, as he tried to describe the greatness and abundance of those blessings which were about to descend upon the people of God. He calls it redemption, a horn of salvation. It is deliverance from enemies, the accomplishment of mercies and promises made from the beginning of the world, the executing of a holy covenant, the performing of the oath of God. In a word, it is the "Highest" Being in the universe, the Lord Jehovah Himself coming to the help of Israel, and sending His prophet before Him ; for John was a prophet and more than a prophet, to declare to a helpless world, sitting in bondage and sin, in the darkness of ignorance and the dread of death, the approach of their Redeemer, the forgiveness of their sins, the rising of a light on high, which should guide their wandering steps into the way of peace. You have often heard this beautiful hymn read or sung in Church, and had its meaning explained to you ; and you may if you please learn it by heart that it may dwell the better in your mind.

E. Yes, Mamma, and I shall enjoy it much more now that I know when and where it was spoken. Mamma, God seems to look upon unbelief as a very great sin; you remember how He punished it in the unbelieving lord of Samaria.

M. Your remark is a just one, my child, and I hope you will always think thus. The want of faith is too often thought by men a very light matter; but God, whose thoughts are not as our thoughts, looks upon it as a very grave offence. In His word we are taught that unbelief is the cause of most of the wickedness we see in the world, and that faith is the first beginning of every thing good, and that without it it is impossible to please God. We see therefore why God has thought fit to punish unbelief very seriously. Not only in the wicked does he notice it, who mock at His word, as did the unbelieving lord of Samaria, but even in his own faithful servants, who, though desirous of pleasing God, yet, by reason of the weakness of their nature, sometimes find their faith fail them. God has our good in view, we may depend upon it, in all his dealings towards us. If He punishes our want of faith, it is because, if we do not believe, we never can obey Him. Besides, is not God very greatly insulted when we refuse to believe His word? How do we feel, in this matter, towards each other? Do we not think ourselves ill used when the truth of what we say is doubted? Or, to put it in another way, still more clearly to you, what do you think papa and I should feel, if you were to doubt the truth of every thing that we told you? We know you to be ignorant, and we instruct you in the best manner we can in all that we know ourselves, and you receive our instruc-

tions, as a child ought, with great humility, and with a confidence that what we tell you is, to the best of our knowledge, true.

E. Yes, mamma ; I always feel quite sure that what you and papa say is right and true.

M. Well, then, as you feel towards us my child, the great God expects us all to feel far more towards Him ; and when we obstinately refuse to believe His words, He is, as you see, most justly displeased. Let it be our constant prayer to Him, that he would give us, not only humble and teachable, but *believing* hearts : faith like every other good thing is His gift, and will be granted to us if we pray for it. Nor can we better begin the study of our blessed Redeemer's life, than with the humble hope that God may give us grace to believe in Him with all our hearts.

We hear but little of John the Baptist during the years of his childhood, nor till he was of a fit age to begin the work appointed for him by God ; but we read that the Spirit of God was with him from the first, so that as he advanced in years, he "waxed strong in spirit" also. And, as he was particularly sent to preach repentance, and to teach men, by mortifying all the corruptions of their hearts, to prepare to receive their Saviour, he did not mix, like other persons, in the scenes and employments about him, but spent the chief part of his time in deserts and lonely places, where his thoughts could not be interrupted from the great work which He was soon to begin. Those who heard him preach would be the more ready to listen to him, you know, when they found that he did not call upon them to do more than

he did himself, but that his whole life was one of hardships and self denial.

And here we must leave John the Baptist for the present, that we may hasten to give our whole attention to the glorious event which occurred very shortly after the birth of this great prophet; I mean the nativity of our blessed Redeemer. We cannot, indeed, begin it to-night; but I have a few more words to say to you before we part upon the subject on which we have now been talking. You must observe then, that what we have been dwelling upon this evening is an extraordinary introduction to the history of our Lord. Let us look back for a moment, and consider with what feelings we should depart from such a subject.

Observe the interest excited in the court of Heaven, at the approaching Incarnation of the Messiah; I mean as the time came for his taking upon Him our flesh.

Whilst mankind in general were busied one with his farm, another with his merchandise, buying and selling, or settling, it may be, more important concerns, even the fate of mighty nations; how little did they think that events (how far more important!) were taking place, in what was generally considered an obscure corner of the earth, amongst persons overlooked for their humble circumstances;—overlooked, but not by the Most High. He seeth not as man seeth; He admireth not what we admire; He values not the aid of human greatness, but sheds “His mercy from generation to generation on them that fear Him.” Behold the ambassador, or messenger of the Most High sent to foretel the birth not only of Jesus,

but of his herald John. He, who was to announce the Redeemer, was himself announced by an angel. The honour done to the messenger, redounds to the glory of his Lord. For his sake it was that Gabriel left his station in the presence of God to converse with mortals; for His sake, that the voice of prophecy woke up afresh from its long silence to welcome the advent of Immanuel; and that one greater than the prophets was set apart from his birth, to go before Him, to prepare the people to receive with gladness the Lord their God. As such let us believe in Jesus Christ; remembering that He is “Immanuel” or “God with us in the flesh;” the highest of all beings incarnate or made flesh for our redemption. What *veneration* should *such* a faith in Christ produce in us; what *gratitude* for his unspeakable condescension! what *confidence* in the “Strength of our Salvation.”—See *John* i. 1—18. *Luke* i. 5—25, 57—80.

SECOND SUNDAY EVENING.

THE SAVIOUR BORN AT BETHLEHEM.

E. Mamma, I have been wishing very much to ask you, how you know all the wonderful things you are telling me about to be really true?

M. We know them, because we are told them by persons who lived at or near the time when they happened, and who were either witnesses of the facts of which they speak, or were told them by those who had seen them. These men were all guided moreover

and taught by the Spirit of God, who, according to our Saviour's gracious promise to his disciples, of which you will hear by and bye, was sent to them to lead them into all truth. He was to bring back also to their remembrance all the important things which they had seen and heard. It is now, you know, more than eighteen hundred years, since our blessed Lord took upon Him our flesh, and lived on earth, and died a cruel death for our salvation.

In all this space of time, had the recollection of what He said and did and suffered, been left to the mere memories of Christians, to be told by word of mouth from father to son, there would now most likely have been very little known for certain on this most important and interesting subject. Much would have been added perhaps that was untrue; much forgotten which was of the greatest consequence to be known. Now, to prevent any such unhappy confusion and ignorance, it seemed good to the Holy Ghost to raise up fit persons who should commit to writing a regular history of our blessed Lord, and leave it for ever with the Church. Thus the latest as well as the earliest generations of Christians would know what they ought to believe, and all agree in the same faith in their common Saviour. The persons thus employed were four in number; St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, and St. John: two of these, St. Matthew and St. John, were apostles; followers of our Lord through the whole of his ministry; especially chosen for this purpose by Christ himself, that they might be eye-witnesses of what He did, hear his discourses, be acquainted with his sufferings, observe his miracles, and behold Him again when He arose from the dead;

that they might see Him even go up into heaven, and then go forth themselves under the guidance of the Holy Ghost to bear witness unto Christ, unto the uttermost parts of the earth. Such were two of the Evangelists: the other two, St. Mark and St. Luke, were not apostles, but they were the intimate companions of apostles, St. Mark having been a great deal with St. Peter, and St. Luke with St. Paul, from whom, as well as from other of the apostles, they were made thoroughly acquainted with all that had happened to our Lord from the very first.

E. I see, Mamma, what you mean; these were the holy men who wrote those four books in the Bible which we call the Gospels.

M. They were, and you must remember that they did not write, as other men write, only according to the best of their own knowledge and ability, but that whatever the inspired Evangelists wrote has the seal of God's Spirit upon it. It was Christ himself, who, on his ascension into heaven, gave gifts of the Spirit by which He enabled some to be Apostles and some Evangelists: they were all guided by the Holy Ghost, and kept from error, so that we may firmly believe all that they tell us, and receive it not as the word of man, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which is able to save our souls.

And think what a privilege it is to have the words and actions of the Son of God recorded for our instruction; to have his holy example ever before us; to have his heavenly doctrine still preserved to us; yea, to have Christ crucified almost visibly set before us in all the circumstances of his awful sufferings; and then to have the account of his victory over death and

the grave, and of his triumphant ascension into the eternal heavens. All this, my child, and more still, we have in the Gospels; as we shall see, I trust, in going on with our present employment. Be thankful then for the divine care and goodness in giving us the four written Gospels; be diligent in reading them, and in listening to those whom God has appointed to instruct you in them, whether it be your Minister at Church, or your Parents at home; that so you may by the Divine grace and blessing grow daily in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,—that you may listen to his precepts, depend upon his promises, follow his footsteps, trust in his atoning blood, and look forward, through the power of his resurrection, to gain the victory now over your sins, and hereafter to triumph over the grave even unto eternal life.

It is with thoughts such as these that I would enter with you upon the history of the Son of God.

E. And now, Mamma, are you really going to begin the life of our Saviour? I thought once we should never come to it. You used to speak of our Lord Jesus Christ very often, and then to stop, though I longed to hear more; but now that you have nothing else to talk about, I shall hear all that I want to know.

M. You cannot be more glad than I am, my dear boy, to find that we are at last beginning the New Testament together. I could not have a more delightful task, than that of leading you to your great Lord and Saviour; and of pointing out to you how worthy that Redeemer is of your utmost reverence, and gratitude, and love; and I earnestly pray that God may be pleased to help me in my undertaking,

and dispose your young mind to receive the Gospel of his blessed Son.

You have heard of all the remarkable circumstances which attended the birth of our Saviour's forerunner John the Baptist. About six months after the angel Gabriel had appeared to Zacharias in the temple, and before John was born, the same glorious being was employed to declare the coming of the Son of God, to that most highly honoured person who had been chosen to be the mother of the Redeemer of the world.

We read that in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God into a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin of the house of David, whose name was Mary;—a humble individual, of lowly condition in this world, and about to be married to a man of the name of Joseph, who followed the business of a carpenter in the city of Nazareth. But though poor in their circumstances, and humble in their station, both Mary and Joseph were directly descended from the house and family of David; and so the Scriptures were fulfilled, which had so long declared that the future Messiah should be descended from the son of Jesse. “And the angel came in unto Mary and said, Hail thou that art highly favoured; the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women.” Glorious was the appearance of the angel, and gracious the words which he spoke; but the humble Mary was disturbed at the sight of so exalted and strange a visitor. She could not understand why an angel should be sent to her lowly dwelling. But the angel said unto her, “Fear not Mary, for thou hast found favour with God. And behold thou shalt bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called

the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of his father David; and He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end." If Mary had been astonished at the sight of the angel Gabriel, what must she have felt when she heard herself thus addressed!

E. Oh! Mamma, I am almost afraid that, like Zacharias, she will not be able to believe.

M. The faith of Mary was very great; she expressed no doubt of the angel's words, she asked no sign to convince her that they were true, she merely requested to be instructed as to the manner in which this strange event was to happen. "How shall this be?" was her short and simple answer. Nor was her humble inquiry displeasing to God. She asked "in faith, nothing doubting," and she obtained an immediate and gracious reply. The angel answered and said unto her, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; and that holy thing that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." This was enough for Mary: she did not wish to search into the purposes of the Almighty, nor yet to doubt, nor dispute his will; she simply answered, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word!" And the angel departed from her.

The angel's visit was over; and Mary was left alone, to think over the strange scene she had just witnessed, to adore the goodness of God which had passed over so many rich and noble in the world and conferred upon her an honour which all the holy women of her people for so many ages, even before the time of

Hannah, had so ardently desired. Mary had now a subject of thought, of which she could never tire: how could she ever sufficiently understand or adore God's dealings towards her! This was a subject to banish every other from her mind, and she must no doubt have longed to relieve her bursting heart by telling to others what great things God had done for her. But to whom should she speak of these things? who would believe such strange tidings? would not the greater part of those about her laugh at the unlikely tale, and look upon her as one who dreamed? Such most probably was the state of Mary's mind, when she recollected that the angel had told her, what favour God had shewn, not only to herself, but to her cousin Elizabeth also. To Elizabeth then she would go; to her she would tell her tale; she who had experienced so much of God's wonderful dealings herself, would be far more ready than any other person to enter into her feelings, and believe the words which she spoke. Therefore "Mary arose in those days," and leaving Nazareth, "went into the hill-country with haste, into a city of Judah," in which was the dwelling of Zacharias and Elizabeth; and when she was come to their abode she rejoiced with them in the happiness which God had so graciously promised them. But before she had time to mention what had happened to herself, her cousin Elizabeth, instructed by the Holy Ghost, understood that in Mary she beheld one whom God had honoured beyond all other women, and so greatly delighted in thinking that it was the mother of her Lord that visited her, that she spake out with a loud voice and said "Blessed art thou among women; and blessed is she that believed; for there shall be a

performance of those things which were told her from the Lord." How cheering must these words have been to the humble Mary ! how must they have increased and strengthened her already great faith ! And now we see what has been passing in her mind since the visit of the angel. In a sublime and affecting song she finds relief for all her mingled feelings of humility, and gratitude, and joy ; and the dwelling of Zacharias and Elizabeth resounds with the sweetest music, even with the voice of joy and thanksgiving, expressed in a hymn of praise, in which the Church from that time to this has ever delighted to join. She now declared openly how her spirit had rejoiced in God her Saviour, and how she delighted in magnifying Him who had condescended to notice her in low estate, and so to notice her, that from henceforth all generations should call her blessed. This hymn of the blessed virgin, Edward, is one which you know ; it is sung every Sunday in the evening service of our Church, between the lessons, or portions of Scripture, which are then read to us : and most wisely and feelingly has it been chosen to form a part of our service, since *we* have full as much reason as Mary had to rejoice in the tidings of salvation conveyed to us in the Gospel ; although, as we are not inspired as she was by the Holy Ghost, no words of ours could in any degree so well express half our joy and gratitude.

Perhaps you have not remarked before that this beautiful hymn is called the Magnificat, from the word with which it begins in Latin, as Papa will shew you if you ask him.

E. Mamma, we have not had the map since we began the New Testament : I want to see Nazareth,

where Mary was living when the angel appeared to her, and then that hill-country, to which she went to see Elizabeth.

M. I am glad you have reminded me of the map. You will find an excellent one of Judea in the "Family Bible," adapted particularly to the study of the New Testament; for it has all the places which we read most about during the life of our Saviour, marked out in a very clear manner. You will find Nazareth in the most northern part of the Holy Land called Galilee, which was again divided into two parts, upper and lower Galilee. The upper part was also distinguished from the lower by being called Galilee of the Gentiles; because it bordered upon the Gentile nations, and indeed was partly inhabited by them.

E. Was Nazareth one of its chief cities?

M. No; it was a small city of mean repute even in those days, and is now reduced to a very low and contemptible condition. There was nothing in the country about it to give this city a bad name; for we are told by some of the old writers, that it was like a paradise, abounding with corn and fruits of all kinds; but it was a place which for some reason, not, I believe, very well known, was exceedingly despised by the Jews, amongst whom it became quite a proverb or saying "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" It seems therefore to have been a part of the voluntary humiliation of the Son of God, that his earthly parents should be Nazarenes, as that in itself was quite enough to make our Lord an object of hatred and contempt to the Jews.

But you wish to hear also of Hebron, that city in the hill-country of Judea, to which Mary went to

visit her cousin Elizabeth. You can see on the map what a long journey Mary must have had; as Hebron lay in the southern part of the Holy Land called Judea, at least seventy miles from Nazareth. The mountains which run from north to south of Judea were probably the cause of its being called the hill-country.

But we must hasten to the birth of the Redeemer of the world. Mary appears to have remained with Elizabeth till after the birth of John the Baptist, when she returned to Nazareth to await in patience the fulfilment of God's promises towards her. And now there is no doubt that she would gladly have remained quietly with her husband in her own home, until the holy infant was born; but this was not to be: there were other prophecies to be still fulfilled; for no word of God can fall to the ground. Several hundred years before this, the prophet Micah had spoken of *Bethlehem* as the place in which the Messiah was to be born, saying, "And thou Bethlehem in the land of Judah art not the least among the princes of Judah; for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel."

E. Was not Bethlehem the place where David was born?

M. It was; there was Christ the Son of David to be born too. But how, you will say, if Mary was living at Nazareth? I will tell you in how remarkable a manner the fulfilment of this prophecy was accomplished. We read in the Bible that "it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. You have not forgotten that the Jews were

now under the dominion of the Romans, and that their own king Herod was merely appointed by the great Roman emperor, Cæsar Augustus, to govern them under him. Now it had long been a custom among the Romans to have an account taken every fifth year of all the Roman citizens. For this purpose officers were appointed whose business it was to enter into a register or book, their names, their wives, and children, with the age, qualities, trades, offices, and estates of them all. This account had at first been confined to the actual provinces of the Roman empire, but was extended by the emperor Augustus, *just at this time*, to all the kingdoms also which were attached to it. You must attend carefully to this circumstance; for it is a most remarkable one. Now when this account was to be taken in any country, the inhabitants were obliged to resort to those cities to which they belonged, to avoid confusion and mistake, and to make the whole matter more simple and easy. In Judea however a little alteration had been made in this rule; for instead of being summoned to the city in which they resided, the people were ordered to go each to his *native* city, or to the place where the inheritance of his fathers lay; and this is the reason why we read, immediately after the account of the taxation, that Joseph also went out of the city of Nazareth into Judea, unto the city of David, to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife. Thus was an alteration trifling in itself overruled by the Providence of God, so as to confirm the truth of his own prophecies! I dare say Joseph and Mary little thought, as they set out on this long and troublesome journey, that it was God himself who was conducting their steps so as to fulfil

his own word. Still less could it occur to the ambitious Cesar, when he was merely seeking to add to the wealth and glory of his wide dominions, by issuing a decree that all the world should be taxed (*all the world* was the proud name arrogantly given to the Roman empire), that he was but an instrument in the hands of the Almighty, accomplishing the purposes of that God whose name he neither knew nor honored ! Thus were the steps of Mary and Joseph guided to the very spot, which had been chosen, ages before, for the birth place of the Redeemer of the world.

To Bethlehem they came ; and whilst they were there, we read that the infant Jesus was born, and laid in a manger ; because there was no room for him in the inn. And here round that lowly manger-bed, let us, dear Edward, pause for a little while, and think of the wonderful humility of the Son of God !

That His love to sinners should be so great as to lead him to lay aside his glory, that glory which he had with the Father from all eternity, and visit our fallen world at all, seems astonishing enough to us. Had he come as some great earthly prince and been treated with all the honour and respect that is paid to the greatest monarchs among men, we might still have been surprised ; for what have we in this world that would not seem mean and poor to Him, who had left behind Him the great and eternal glory that surrounds the throne of God ? But it was not even thus that our Redeemer came. When it pleased Him to take upon Him our nature, He chose to take it in its most humble form. Mary and Joseph, his earthly parents, were most likely too poor even to afford to pay for a room, in the inn at Bethlehem, which was crowded with

persons far richer and greater, to all human appearance, than they ; and, fatigued with their long journey, they were glad to be allowed to take shelter in a stable. And here, in this mean and miserable place, the infant Redeemer was laid.

“ No peaceful home upon his cradle smiled ;
Guests rudely came and went where slept the royal child.”

How many a Christian mother might compare the comforts and blessings, which her own child is enjoying, with the rude cold blasts that swept by the manger-bed of the infant Saviour and the rude noises and rough steps that disturbed his repose !

It is by dwelling on every little circumstance connected with our Saviour's birth that we get some idea, though a very faint one, of his great humility. To understand it fully, my child, we must wait till we get to that world where we shall see Him as He is. Then, and not till then, shall we be able to form any just idea of the love that brought Him down to our world ; and of the infinite condescension which led Him to take upon Him the form of a poor suffering infant. Meanwhile we may each take up the song of infant lips and say—

“ How I wonder when I see
His unbounded love to me !”

And perhaps, Edward, we shall continue to wonder at it through all eternity ; for the more we know of the love of Christ, the more cause shall we find for wonder ; the more persuaded shall we be that it is indeed a love “ which passeth knowledge.” We learn from the Bible, that even the angels round the throne of God look upon the redemption of our lost world

with astonishment. “ ‘The Word made flesh and dwelling among men’ draws the eyes of those glorious beings, and fills them with admiration to see the Almighty Godhead joined with the weakness of man, yea even of a helpless infant; to behold him ‘that stretcheth forth the heavens’ bound up in swaddling clothes.” See *Luke* i. 1—4. 26—56. *Matt.* i. 18—25. *Luke* ii. 1—7.

THIRD SUNDAY EVENING.

ANGELS ANNOUNCE THE SAVIOUR.

M. I am sure I need not remind you, Edward, of the subject of our last conversation; I saw plainly that you were too much interested in it to be able to forget it very quickly. I should be happy to believe as I hope I may, that, amidst the duties and enjoyments of the last week, you have often stopped to think of all that you then heard, and that, whilst remembering how greatly the Son of God humbled Himself, you have not forgotten how very ugly and sinful all proud and haughty tempers are in those who call themselves *His* followers. In reading the history of our Redeemer, which the Holy Spirit has given us in His word, we shall indeed be happy if we seek earnestly to follow His blessed example, and to have, in some faint degree, the same mind in us which was also in Christ Jesus. Let this be our endeavour, my child; so shall we not read in vain, but have reason, through all our lives, to recol-

lect with satisfaction the evenings which we now spend together in dwelling upon the life of Christ.

You have seen how greatly the Son of God abased Himself at His first entrance into our world ; it pleased God, however, at many periods during His short stay on earth, to crown Him with extraordinary honour and glory ; faint glimpses indeed of the glory which surrounded Him on the throne of the eternal God, and yet such honour and glory as the greatest of earthly kings have never known. We have seen how an angel was sent to announce His birth, and how the Bible tells us not of one angel only, but of multitudes of the heavenly host, who hovered round the place where Jesus was born.

E. Did the angels then surround the manger where Christ was laid ?

M. No, there were no angels there visible to mortal sight ; but in the country around Bethlehem “shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night,” were visited by these heavenly beings. The simple hearts of these humble men were to be gladdened with the sound of the strange news which angel lips were to proclaim to them. The Bible says that “the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were sore afraid.” Strange, no doubt, and dazzling was that light ; no wonder that the shepherds were disturbed at it ; for none even of God’s most favoured servants have been able to behold his glory. We know how Moses said at the sight of it, “I exceedingly fear and quake,” and how Elijah wrapped his face in his mantle whilst the Lord passed by ; and yet both Moses and Elijah had been

accustomed to the voice of God, speaking to them as to a friend. Sin has separated man so far from God, that he cannot now bear to feel himself in His glorious presence. But this was no message of terror. Not long did these favoured shepherds tremble. The angel said unto them, "Fear not; for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people; for unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour which is Christ the Lord." And whilst the shepherds listened to the voice of this strange but glorious messenger, and wondered what the kind and happy words he spoke could mean, they saw him suddenly surrounded with a multitude of the heavenly host, from whose blessed lips there burst such music as had never been heard on earth before. For they were praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill towards men." Peace on earth—was pronounced on this great occasion; and it is remarkable that at this time there were no wars going on in any of the countries of the earth, but a universal peace reigned throughout the world. To this perhaps the angels in part alluded, yet by no means to this only, but rather to that great peace which the new-born Saviour should make between God and man. Glorious, my child, must the sight have been! Happy those who were permitted to behold it! Happy those who were allowed to hear that heavenly anthem, chaunted as it was by angel-tongues! But happy likewise, unspeakably happy and blessed are all those who have since heard the joyful sound and rejoiced therein! On the plains of Bethlehem it first began; but (praised be God!) it did not rest there. "Its

sound has since gone forth into all lands, and its voice into the end of the world:" not only have all the company of heaven taken up the song, but those good tidings of great joy have continued, from that time to this, to make glad the hearts of thousands and tens of thousands of sinful human beings: and to make them glad in such a manner as only hearts afflicted by sin could truly understand. The pure and holy angels exulted in the message they were sent to deliver; because they delight in glorifying God, and feel a tender interest in the happiness of men. It was for us indeed that they rejoiced, not for themselves. They had never fallen, and therefore never known what sin and sorrow mean. Their lips might utter the glad tidings; but it was for lost and sinful man to know how to value them. But you are anxious to hear further accounts of these favoured shepherds. The angels had given them a sign, by which they should know their infant Redeemer; for they told them that they should find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

E. It was well they did tell them, Mamma; for I am sure they would never have thought of looking in such a place for the Saviour of the world: do you think they would?

M. No, I think if they had not been directed from above, they would naturally have searched in palaces and splendid houses for the glorious child. All the Jewish people expected that the Messiah of whom their prophets had spoken, and who had been promised to them for so many ages, would appear amongst them as a great earthly prince, and be surrounded with the utmost human glory. Instructed, however,

by the angel, the shepherds quickly laid aside all their own ideas upon the subject, and with humble faith hastened immediately to the spot which had been pointed out to them, saying one to another, as soon as the angels had gone away from them into heaven, "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known to us. And they came with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger." Then, thankful for having obtained this knowledge themselves, and anxious that others should share their happiness, they made known abroad all that had been told them concerning the child; and having done this, they returned to their humble occupations with hearts cheered and gladdened by the blessed sight: contented, no doubt, with their lowly lot, and prepared to spend happier hours on the plains of Bethlehem, than they had ever known before. Perhaps they had been formerly inclined to murmur at their obscure condition, and the hardships to which it often exposed them. They had suffered from burning heat by day, and the piercing cold by night; but they would now think of all this with thankfulness, as having been to them the occasion of so glorious a revelation. How sweet and cheering to their hearts, through all the long nights they had yet to spend, would be the remembrance of the glad tidings they had now heard! How would they encourage one another, as they gazed on the cold sky, with the recollection of the bright vision they had there beheld! The Bible tells us that "the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had seen and heard."

I must now carry you on to the next circumstance which is mentioned in our Lord's history, and tell you how, when He was eight days old, the name was given Him, by which, before His birth, the angel had directed that He should be called,—even that Name which is above every name; by which He is still known, and will be for ever known and loved in His Church. You remember the angel said, “He shall be called JESUS; for He shall save His people from their sins.” The word Jesus means *Saviour*, and had before this time been given to other persons, as for instance, to Joshua, and was a common name among the Jews. Yet to no one could it ever be given with any thing like the propriety or fulness of meaning, with which it was now applied to the helpless babe of Bethlehem. He was to be the Saviour, not of one generation or people only, but of the whole world; He was to save not the bodies of men, but their souls, being made flesh for this very purpose, that He might “save His people from their sins.”

In old times God has been known by many a name of power and of majesty; but His name of *Mercy* was kept till now, when He poured out the whole treasure of His compassion in the person of His only Son. For if the name of Jehovah be full of majesty and terror to sinful creatures like ourselves, surely the name of Jesus, when we understand the meaning of it, is full of sweetness and mercy. It would seem that in giving His Holy Son such a name as this, the great and everlasting God would invite us in the most gentle manner to draw near unto Himself, to approach Him without fear.

This then is the name which we must love above

every name; the name which we should engrave upon our hearts, and pronounce with the greatest reverence, and thankfulness, and affection. It is the name which we should rest our faith upon, and place our hopes in, seeking through Him, who for our sakes condescended to bear it, to be *saved* from all our sins in this world, and from eternal ruin in that world which is to come. It was of this name that king Solomon spoke, when he said that it was “as ointment poured forth;” and of this name it is said in the New Testament that it is above every name; “for at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, both of things in heaven and things in earth, and things under the earth:”—and that “there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby they may be saved.”

Among the Jews it was the custom, as their law indeed required of them, to name children on the eighth day after their birth; and on the same occasion they were circumcised, or admitted into the Jewish Church, and so made subject to all the law of Moses. With us, you know, children are admitted into the Church of Christ by baptism, in their very earliest days; for instance you, when you were quite an infant, were taken by your parents and sponsors to the house of God, and there, at the sacred font, dedicated or given, through Christ, to the service of God. Solemn prayers were offered up, that our Lord Jesus Christ would vouchsafe to receive you for His own, to deliver you from the state of sin in which we were all by nature born, to sanctify you by His Holy Spirit; yes, and to give you the kingdom of heaven with everlasting life. Blessed privileges those! thus

to be placed in the arms of the Saviour's mercy, and under the protection of His Holy Spirit, as one of the family of God ! But remember, my child, that promises were made then, as well as prayers, in your behalf ; and that now by the grace which is in Christ, the merciful favour which God has shewn to you in Him, and the help which God is ever ready for His sake to bestow, you must daily strive to lead the rest of your life according to that happy beginning. Yes ; you must never forget the cross which was then marked upon your brow, nor ever be "ashamed to confess" the faith of your crucified Saviour, but manfully fight under His banner against every enemy of your soul, and thus "continue Christ's faithful soldier and servant unto your life's end." May such be your happy lot ! May such through God's great love and mercy be the lot of us all ! Then shall we indeed be blessed in our Christian privileges.

But to return. Our gracious Redeemer was born, as we have seen, of a lowly woman ; born under the law of Moses, made subject to all its commands. Though the Lord of glory, and worshipped in heaven by the angelic hosts, He stooped down to be made and to be treated like sinful men. He was a King to *give* laws, yet He became as a servant to *receive* them. He left nothing wanting to the fulness of His obedience, or to the completeness of His condescension. Let us observe too, that in being born among the Jews, and not among any other people, our blessed Lord fulfilled those predictions of the Old Testament, which foretold that the great Deliverer of mankind should be a descendant of *Abraham*, and not of Abraham only, but of *Jacob* rather than of any other of

Abraham's sons or grandsons; nay more, that he should spring up expressly out of the tribe of *Judah*, and in that tribe should be of the lineage and family of *David*. That we may see this quite clearly, the Evangelists, that is, the holy men who wrote the Gospels, are very careful to give us long tables of descent, or genealogies as they are called, to shew that the Virgin Mary, the mother of our Lord, was of David's line. Nor is this the only instance in which we have had an opportunity of observing already, in the history of our Lord, the wonderful fulfilment of prophecy, that is to say, the accomplishment, through the overruling care of God, of those things relating to His Son which, ages before, He had in His word declared should come to pass. His childhood was spoken of by Isaiah, who lived as you may remember in the time of the good king Hezekiah, many generations before the Redeemer's birth. In the ninth chapter of his prophecies he says, "Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." The very place too of His birth had been pointed out, as I told you once before, by the prophet Micah, more than seven hundred years before the nativity took place.

E. Yes, I remember his very words, Mamma; for we were reading them the other day: they were, "And thou Bethlehem Ephrata, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto me, that is to be ruler in Israel,

whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting."

M. You see then even from these two verses which we have quoted, and I could tell you many more, with what reverence the prophets approached the subject of our Lord's incarnation; and although we read of Him as a helpless infant, we must ever think and speak of Him with the utmost adoration. We must remember that, amid all this outward weakness and obscurity, this is the very Deliverer who was promised to Eve, and then to Abraham; whom kings and prophets desired to see; and to whom the hopes of the faithful in old time were all along directed. Wonderful are the ways of God. His thoughts are not as our thoughts. The first in the world's esteem are often the last with Him. The Son of God when He visits our earth is not born among the mighty Romans, in the palace of the Cæsars, but among the despised Jews, in a stable at Bethlehem:—See *Luke* ii. 8—21. and iii. 23—38. *Matt.* i. 1—17.



FOURTH SUNDAY EVENING.

JEWS AND GENTILES REJOICING IN CHRIST.

E. DOES the Bible tell us much about our blessed Saviour whilst he was a little child?

M. No; we do not find many accounts of his early infancy, and childhood, nor indeed of that portion of

His life which passed away before His entrance upon His public ministry. It was not till He was thirty years of age, that He actively took upon Him that great work for which He came into the world, and began, by His blessed teaching and His many acts of compassion and love, "to seek and to save that which was lost." Accordingly, the Gospel History is chiefly confined to the closing years of our Saviour's life upon earth; but we have some further accounts even of His earliest infancy, besides those which we dwelt upon in our last conversation, and in all of these I am sure you will be greatly interested. The one that comes next in order is that of the Presentation in the Temple. For when the child Jesus was forty days old, the Virgin Mary took Him to present Him to the Lord, as the law required, in the temple at Jerusalem. At this time there dwelt at Jerusalem a just and devout man of the name of Simeon. He was one of those pious Jews, who were continually thinking of God's gracious promises which He had made to His people; and who were constantly hoping to see them fulfilled. But there was one promise, Edward, more than all the rest, which had been dear to all the faithful servants of God, for many, many generations back. Do you think you can tell me what that was?

E. Yes, Mamma, I do hope I can: are you not thinking of the first promise we read of in the Bible, the promise of a Saviour? you know I could not well have forgotten that, you have put me in mind of it so often.

M. I am glad, if I have succeeded in making the chief subject of the Bible uppermost in your thoughts. It was this blessed hope of a Redeemer to come, which

revived the hearts of the faithful servants of God from the earliest ages of the world. Who can say to what degree it comforted our first parents, as they left behind them the garden of God; carrying with them, no doubt, a deep sense of the miseries which they had brought upon themselves and all mankind? Long, I dare say, did they continue to hear the sound of those gracious words;—"The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head." And the precious truths which those blessed words contained were made use of by the prophets of the Old Testament as the never-failing consolation of the Church, under all her distresses. None can read those interesting and delightful portions of Scripture, which we call the books of the prophets, without observing how continually the expectation of a Redeemer gilded almost every subject which they approached.

The thought of the Messiah, whom God had promised, was sufficient to comfort them under the bitterest distresses, and "the doctrine of salvation which they preached through Him, does still refresh the people of God, as a stream of water in a thirsty land, and still shall do so till it empty itself into the ocean of eternity."

It was the coming of Christ, as "the consolation of Israel," as he is called in the Gospel of St. Luke, for which the most believing and religious Jews seem, at this time, to have been looking with more than usual expectation. In the case, indeed, of Simeon, there was something more still; he had been favoured by being peculiarly inspired by the Holy Spirit of God; for that blessed Spirit had in some mysterious manner made known to him, that notwithstanding his great

age (for Simeon was an old man) “he should not see death, until he had seen the Lord’s Christ.”

Happy Simeon ! what a blessed promise to cheer his few remaining days ! no doubt he watched for its fulfilment, and thought every day long till he should see the much desired Saviour.

Such was the state of his mind, “waiting” like Jacob of old for the “Salvation” of God, which it was granted to him to see more clearly, when he went up into the Temple on the very day, on which the parents of our Lord came thither with the holy infant ; and taking up the child in his arms, as they brought Him in, Simeon broke forth immediately into that beautiful hymn of prayer, and praise, and prophecy, which you hear said or chaunted in our Churches continually in the afternoon service. “Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace,” said the aged saint ; “for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation.”

E. Oh ! now I see what you meant when you said he was like Jacob of old ; for I remember how Jacob said upon his death-bed, when all his sons were gathered round him, “I wait for Thy salvation, O God !”

M. You are quite right ; those were the very words in which that aged Patriarch was allowed to prophesy of his Redeemer, whom he saw by the eye of faith, though so very far off. How much fuller was the revelation granted to Simeon ! Imagine to yourself a venerable old man, who had long lived by faith in the word of God, and never doubted that that word would one day be fulfilled, but who was now approaching to the very edge of the tomb, and expecting to leave the world with the promise still afar off ; then think of the joy that would fill his heart upon being

assured that he should not die till he had seen the long-expected Saviour; still more when he beheld the holy babe approaching, and was permitted to take Him in his arms. Well might he say, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation." Happy old man! he had seen the Lord's Christ, and he could hardly find words in which to express his thankfulness. "He rejoiced, he prophesied, he worshipped, he sang hymns; he held in his aged arms Him that filled all the world, and then was so satisfied, that he desired to live no longer. God had fulfilled His promise, had shewn him the Messiah, had filled his heart with joy and made his old age honorable; and now, after all this sight, no object could be pleasant, but the joys of heaven: his eyes had been so filled with the glory he had now seen, that he was willing to close them on this world for ever." Nor was it only for himself that the aged saint rejoiced; nor only for the people of his own country. The eyes of the prophetic Simeon, enlightened by the Holy Spirit saw the salvation of God in its true light, as extending to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews; and his heart, free from all Jewish pride and prejudice, glowed with thankfulness for all. The faith of Simeon was of that kind which is described in Scripture as working by love, love to God, and love to his fellow-men; this is the only true and real faith, the only faith which will be owned by God for Christ's sake, and rewarded at the great day. It would have been no satisfaction to this holy man to have thought that the inestimable blessing of Redemption was confined to his own people, whilst all the rest of the world should continue still to

sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death. No: he rejoiced to think that the child, now in his arms, should grow up to be a light to lighten the Gentiles, as well as to be the glory of His people Israel.

E. I wonder what Joseph and Mary thought of that beautiful hymn which Simeon spoke before them.

M. All that they had heard and seen since the birth of this wonderful child, must have made them more and more sensible of the high honour God had done them in choosing them to be His earthly guardians. They were filled with wonder, when they heard the words of Simeon; and astonishing indeed, even to the angels, is the redemption of mankind, the restoring of a lost world from ignorance and sin to light and glory.

When he had finished his thanksgiving, the inspired Simeon turned to Joseph and Mary, and blessed them; then, addressing himself more particularly to the mother of our Lord, He prepared her for great suffering; for he told her that, though her child was to be so great and glorious a Saviour, he would meet with much opposition, and be to herself an occasion of bitter anguish. “Behold, said he, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel: yea, a sword shall pierce through thine own soul also.” By which we may understand, that many who were perhaps despised among the Jews, and who had even fallen it may be into grievous sins, should, on their repenting and believing in Christ, be raised again to holiness, and peace, and favour with God; but others who were high in worldly repute should, for their want of faith in him, be condemned and punished: whilst the soul of the now happy mother should be pierced through with many sorrows, as she beheld the

sufferings which her blessed Son should undergo for the salvation of mankind. But in what way the prophecy of Simeon was fulfilled, we shall better understand, as we go on with our history. For the present, let us turn our attention to another witness to Christ, whom the all-wise Providence of God had raised up and brought to the Temple at the same time, *accidentally* as it *appeared*; but, we cannot doubt that this was expressly ordered by the Almighty, with a view of making Christ more widely known among those who were really looking for Him. This second witness was Anna, an aged woman and also a prophetess, favored like Simeon with divine inspiration; a woman of extraordinary piety, who spent her whole life in the Temple, setting herself apart as a chosen vessel for the more immediate service of the Lord. She, coming up, as the scripture tells us, in the very hour when Simeon was speaking of the blessed child, added her testimony to his, and “began to speak of him to all who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.”

Such were the first manifestations of our Lord Jesus Christ to the Jews! It was meet, as we learn from many parts of Scripture, that he should be made known to them first: the Gospel is indeed the power of God unto salvation unto all that believe, but to the Jew first.” To Jewish shepherds first at Bethlehem did the angel of the Lord appear with the glad tidings of a Saviour’s birth; and then to Jewish prophets in the Temple, did the Holy Ghost make the divine infant known. But the Gentiles heard of Him also, even at this early period.

E. I should like to know how it was made known to them: was it by angels, Mamma?

M. No, not by an angel, but by a *Star*; for all

parts of creation, even those that are not gifted with reason and speech, were made to bear witness to the Son of God. We read, in the Gospel according to St. Matthew, of a wonderful appearance at this time in the heavens; wonderful perhaps I should not call it: or rather, in the history of our Lord, we shall find every thing wonderful. And this indeed was but a fulfilment of that famous prophecy of Isaiah which I have already pointed out to you, in which the title *Wonderful* is expressly given to the child that should be born for the redemption of mankind.

“Wonderful He is in His birth, as we have already seen; wonderful in His life and death, particularly in His infancy; so that, as wonderful is the beginning of His name, so wonderful was the beginning of His life.”

E. But what was this strange appearance in the sky of which you were speaking?

M. It was a new star in the heavens, which had never been seen before, and which was now observed in the East, by some philosophers, or wise men called Magi. How far this extraordinary star was to be seen in other parts, besides those to the East of Judea, or how the Magi knew by it that a king was born among the Jews, we are not told. There was, we know, at this time a general expectation of a great monarch who was to come out of the East; and there might perhaps remain in that part of the world some recollection, however faint, of the striking prophecy which Balaam uttered from the heights of Moab. You remember it, I dare say, Edward?

E. You mean, I suppose, Mamma, when he spoke of the “star which should come out of Jacob, and the sceptre which should rise out of Israel.”

M. I do ; but even if the wise men knew of this prophecy, we can hardly suppose that they would have been able to understand it. It is likely, however, that besides any knowledge they might possibly have had of ancient prophecy, and besides the appearance of this star, it pleased God in some way or other to make known to them the meaning of it ; sending no doubt “some higher light into their minds, clearer than that of the star, to make its meaning clear to them.” But however this was, there came, we are told, wise men from the East to Jerusalem, saying, Where is He that is born king of the Jews ? for we have seen his star in the East, and are come to worship Him.” A strange question this, to those who knew nothing of all the astonishing events, which had been taking place at Bethlehem ; and much surprise did it occasion among those who heard it : so much so, that these strangers and their extraordinary inquiry began to be talked about all over Jerusalem, till it reached even the court of Herod. And when Herod the king heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him, and he inquired of the chief priests and Scribes where Christ was to be born : from them he learnt that He was to be born in Bethlehem, as the prophet Micah had declared ; and he immediately sent on the wise men to Bethlehem, saying to them, “Go and search diligently for the young child ; and when ye have found Him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship Him.”

Having obtained the information they so much desired, the wise men proceeded on their way, and that same star, which they had seen in their own country, appeared to them again and “went before them, till

it came and stood over the place where the young child was." Now "when they saw the star they rejoiced with exceeding great joy; and when they came into the house, they saw the young child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshipped Him; and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto Him gifts, gold, and frankincense, and myrrh."

Such is the simple and beautiful account, which is given us in the Bible, of the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles. Let us examine it now a little more closely, and see what interesting information, and what useful lessons, we may draw from it.

And first let us observe, that the persons of whom we have been talking, are called in the Bible "*wise men*:" wise in the wisdom of this world, and in such learning as was held in high esteem in their times, and in the country in which they lived, and more especially perhaps in that branch of wisdom, which is called astronomy, or the knowledge of the heavenly bodies. But happy was it for these wise men, that their wisdom did not stop here. Vain are the highest attainments in knowledge, if unaccompanied by the knowledge of Divine truth. It has been observed by a wise and holy Bishop of our Church, who lived many, years ago, that the star of the East might have been seen by other sages besides those spoken of in the Bible. At any rate they would have been likely to point it out to their brother philosophers. "But," says the holy man, "only they followed it who knew that it had more than nature. He is truly wise, who is wise for his own soul. If these men had been acquainted with all the other stars of

heaven, and had not seen the star of Christ, they would have had but light enough to lead them into utter darkness. Philosophy, without this star, is but the wisp of error." There are but few, my child, to whom it is given, to indulge with the wise men of the East in the sublime truths of astronomy; there are but few who can measure the spaces of heaven, and search into the laws by which the stars are governed. But to all of us, even to the most humble Christian, a privilege is given, the noblest that Eastern sages ever enjoyed. However ignorant of other stars, we may yet be acquainted with *that*, which alone it is of any great importance to us to know. Without any attainments in worldly wisdom, we may all rejoice in the light which has been revealed to us from heaven, to lead us unto Christ. Yes, Edward, this is a knowledge which even a child may arrive at. Long before his tender mind could bear other learning, he may be taught to know and love his Saviour! As the star led the wise men, so may the written account of it lead us—yea, the light of the whole Gospel is continually shining upon us, and directing us most plainly to the Redeemer of the world. Far greater indeed is our privilege, than that which the Magi enjoyed.

They saw the *Star* of Christ, the forerunner of a bright day of religious truth; but the sun of righteousness Himself has risen upon us. They considered Christ as an earthly king, and honoured Him as such; for they brought Him rich presents, such as it was the custom in those days to present to great earthly monarchs; but we know that His kingdom was not of

this world, though over it; that His throne is for ever and ever; that He is a king of righteousness, and a Prince of Peace.

E. I should like very much to know where these wise men came from. You told me they came from the East, Mamma; but there are many countries to the East of Judea.

M. I wish I could completely satisfy you on this subject. I can however only tell you that it is generally supposed that they came from Arabia; the presents they brought with them being of such rich and costly things, as that country was known to produce, as we shall see presently. I must first tell you that the word Magi, which is the Greek name for these wise men, was the old name of a Median family, who were devoted to the study of science, and of such religion as the Medes possessed. In course of time the word became more extensively used, till at length all learned people in those parts used to call themselves Magi.

Now it was the custom in all Eastern countries for subjects, and especially conquered people, to bring to their monarch, every year, either a tribute in money, or a present of some of the choicest productions of their country. You have heard of this often before.

E. Oh! yes, often; but I was thinking just then of the good king Hezekiah, who was obliged to cut the gold off the doors of the Temple, that he might send his tribute to Sennacherib.

M. I am glad you remember so well what you are told; now, you see, that circumstance will throw light upon our present subject; that is, you will better understand this account of the wise men, and their

presents to Christ, in consequence of being so well acquainted with other parts of Sacred History.

The Persian kings used to receive continually such gifts as these, and we read particularly, in ancient history, of such presents as gold-dust, frankincense, and myrrh, being brought to them by the people of India and Arabia. Accordingly the wise men, who are generally thought to have come from Arabia, did not presume to come into the presence of Christ, the newborn king of the Jews, without some such tokens of their submission and respect. I need not now tell you what kind of productions these were, as I gave you an account of them some time ago; and I dare say you remember well how precious and choice each one of these articles was. I would rather hasten on now, to see what lesson we may obtain from this part of our history.

For is not the act of the Magi, in spirit at least, a pattern for us? I do not say that we must now bring gold, and frankincense, and myrrh, and lay them upon the altar of the Lord. The magi honored Christ, as a temporal king, with such presents as were usual on such occasions; whereas the homage we must pay to our blessed Lord and King, is that which is due to a spiritual monarch. But still we cannot do better than copy their spirit. We may not indeed be either wise or rich as they were: but if we really love Christ, we shall rejoice at any opportunity we may have of ministering to Him in our substance, by giving help and comfort for His sake to our poorer brethren, remembering those gracious words of His, "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these, ye did it unto me!" Deeds of kindness and charity, done from love to Him, will be far more acceptable to our Lord than the costliest

offerings of gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. In this way, we, like the wise men, may open our treasures, and give, according to our power, to our poorer brethren. And we too may worship Him;—not indeed, as these favoured philosophers did, by bowing ourselves at his sacred feet; but we can worship Him in spirit and in truth; we can, by His grace, give Him our hearts and all our best affections. These are offerings which He still requires, and will not despise. The holy Psalmist says, in speaking of Christ, “He shall live, and unto Him shall be given of the gold of Arabia; prayer shall be made ever unto Him, and daily shall He be praised:” so that what the Magi only began, we and all nations must continue even to the end of time, and, beyond time, through all eternity.

To this end we must be as earnest in our inquiries after Christ as the Magi were; as anxious to find Him; and when by His grace we have found Him, as we may in His word, in His house, and in all those precious means of grace which He has given us, and in which He makes Himself known to His people, then we may rejoice as the wise men of the East rejoiced, “with exceeding great joy.” It will not do to say, “I am not wise, I am not rich, and therefore I have nothing to give to Christ:” for we have all hearts to give Him. Nor must any one say in excuse, “I have a heart, but it is unfit for Him, all dark, and sinful, and out of order.” Such indeed are all our hearts by nature; but we must give them to Him, and He will take them, and make them better, far better, than all the myrrh, and frankincense, and gold, of the East; He will make them quite different from what they

[*Second Series.*]

D

are now, and we shall never be sorry that we have made a gift of them to Him. He will frame them like His own ; and, in return, He will give Himself to us, and be ours for ever and ever.

See *Luke* ii. 22—38. *Matt.* ii. 1—11.

FIFTH SUNDAY EVENING.

THE INFANTS AT BETHLEHEM.

M. The subject of our conversation, my dear child, the last time we met for this purpose was a very pleasant one. We found both Jew and Gentile rejoicing in the birth of the Redeemer. But whilst good men were hailing with delight this great event, there were others who regarded it with far different feelings. You have heard already, when the Magi proceeded to Jerusalem, and there made inquiries respecting the newborn king of the Jews, how Herod was troubled, and not only Herod, but all Jerusalem with him. The news, which should have filled them with joy and gladness, was to them only an occasion of terror and alarm : so little did the Chief Priests and Scribes, whom Herod consulted on the occasion, understand the true meaning of those prophecies which related to their expected Messiah or Christ ; although they ought to have been well acquainted with the revealed will of God, it being the especial office of these persons to instruct the Jewish people in the Holy Scriptures. In vain, however, did Herod apply to them, in hopes of ob-

taining relief for his troubled mind. They told him indeed, out of the books of the Prophets, that Christ was to be born at Bethlehem; but they quite misunderstood the nature of His kingdom. They thought He would come as a great earthly prince, to deliver their nation from the Roman yoke, and make the kingdom of David once more famous in the world as it had been in former times. No wonder, then, that, with his mind full of such ideas, Herod should be troubled, when he heard the Magi inquire for one newly-born to be king of the Jews.

E. Will you let me interrupt you a moment, Mamma, just to ask who this Herod was? I want to know whether he was the same that we have heard of before, who was made king of the Jews by the Romans, and whom you said they called Herod the Great?

M. The very same, my dear boy; he was a man remarkable for his cruel temper, and being troubled when he heard of the birth of Jesus, he immediately resolved to destroy Him, waiting only till the Magi should bring him full information respecting the child, on which he should proceed with certainty to the execution of his wicked purpose. But God, who knows all things, even the inmost thoughts of our hearts, saw the evil designs of Herod. He managed, indeed, to conceal them from men, by pretending to be as eager as the others were to go and worship the newborn king; but he could not hide them from God. Accordingly, in a dream, the Almighty warned the wise men not to return to Herod as he had requested, but to go back to their own country another way. Thus was Herod interrupted in his cruel purpose, for

whilst he was waiting for the return of the Magi, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise and take the young child and His mother, and flee into Egypt; and be thou there until I bring thee word, for Herod will seek the young child to destroy Him. And when Joseph arose, he took the young child and His mother by night, and departed into Egypt; and was there until the death of Herod."

You know full well, my child, where Egypt is. In the history of the Old Testament we have often had occasion to mention that country. There, we know, Israel went down out of Canaan, and there he dwelt for a time, until God was pleased to call him out thence again: and indeed in this part of his history, what happened to Israel, God's adopted child, may be looked upon as a sort of type or figure of what afterwards befel the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. By one of the prophets God was pleased to speak these words, "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt:" words true indeed in some sense of the people Israel, but in their *full* sense true only of Him, who is distinguished by the title of God's "beloved Son, in whom He is well pleased." In His love to the child Jesus, God caused Him to be taken into Egypt; until the time should come, when He could be called back again in safety. Thus was the life of Jesus not only preserved from the wicked designs of Herod, but preserved in that very land which prophecy had pointed out beforehand as a place of refuge for His childhood.

E. How angry Herod must have been, Mamma,

when he found out that the wise men had deceived him, and gone back to their own land another way !

M. Great indeed was his rage, when he found himself thus mocked by those very persons from whom he had expected to learn all particulars respecting Christ ; and now, not knowing exactly where Jesus was to be found, or of what age precisely He was, he sent and slew all the little children who were not more than two years old, not only in Bethlehem, but in all its neighbourhood. What a dreadful act of cruelty was this ! What grief and anguish must it have occasioned ! like that, and that only, described by the prophet Jeremiah, when he said, “ A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping ; Rachel, weeping for her children, refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not.” Never indeed had these words been as fully verified as now ; this was their great fulfilment. For when were ever so many mothers so cruelly and at once deprived of their tender infants ? and it is worthy of being remarked, that the neighbourhood of Bethlehem, where Rachel’s tomb was, was after her called *Rachel* : the whole land of Rachel was weeping and would not be comforted. And yet had the mothers of those babes known in whose cause their blood was shed, they would perhaps have found some comfort in the thought, that they were the first martyrs for Christ ; that is, the first who died for His sake, and that He who came on purpose to give up His life for them, would never suffer them to die for Him in vain. Could these sorrowing parents have known, how tenderly this blessed Saviour would afterwards gather little children to Him and bless them, they would not have wept so

much ; surely they would not have refused to be comforted ; but would have trusted their precious infants cheerfully with Him, who could keep them safely in His holy arms for ever !

E. You do not mean with Him on earth, Mamma, but with Him safely in heaven.

M. I do my child ; and now I wish, that before we leave this subject, you would repeat to me that beautiful hymn of Bishop Heber's, on the death of the holy innocents. It will give us some sweet thoughts upon this sad, but interesting history.

I.

E. “ Oh ! weep not o'er thy children's tomb,
 Oh ! Rachel, weep not so !
The bud is cropt by martyrdom,
 The flower in heaven will blow.

II.

“ Firstlings of faith ! the murderer's knife
Has missed its deadliest aim ;
The God, for whom they gave their life,
Has given His own for them.

III.

“ Though feeble were their days, and few,
Baptized in blood and pain,
He knows them, whom they never knew,
And they shall live again.”

M. You have seen now what a cruel man this king Herod was, thus to murder so many innocent children ! His history affords us a melancholy proof of the length to which the passions of mankind will carry them, if not kept under control. Herod's great sin was a love of power. It was to preserve his power that he killed these poor babes. He thought Christ

would one day take away his crown from him ; and, not knowing that the good providence of God had removed Him far out of his way, he thought he should be sure, in putting to death all the little children in and about Bethlehem, to kill Jesus also. It was not long however before Herod died himself, and was obliged to leave for ever all that power and greatness, for the sake of which he had committed such grievous sins.

On the death of Herod, Joseph, who was still in Egypt with the young child Jesus and His mother, was directed by an angel to bring them back again into the land of Israel. Accordingly they came again into Palestine ; but when Joseph heard that a son of Herod, named Archelaus, was made king of Judea in his father's room, he was afraid to return to Bethlehem. In this difficulty God was pleased to direct him again what to do ; and, guided by Him, he went from Judea into Galilee, and took up his abode at Nazareth, which you will remember was the city where Joseph and Mary were living when we first hear of them, before they went to Bethlehem to be taxed.

See *Matt.* ii. 12—23. *Luke* ii. 39.

SIXTH SUNDAY EVENING.

THE CHILDHOOD OF JESUS.

WE have now finished, my dear Edward, the history of our blessed Saviour's infancy ; we have seen how the Son of God condescended for our sakes to submit to poverty and hardship, to persecution and contempt.

Angels indeed sent shepherds to adore Him ; but it was in a manger : wise men came from afar to do Him homage ; but the king of Judea seeks to destroy Him. He is driven into banishment, and when He returns to His country, it is to dwell in one of the most despised cities of Galilee and to be called a Nazarene. But even this turned to his glory in reality ; for His dwelling at Nazareth was not less a fulfilment of prophecy, than His birth at Bethlehem.

For whilst it was expressly said that the great ruler of Israel should come out of Bethlehem, it was also intimated that He should be called a Nazarene. The prophet Isaiah also foretold that he should be “despised, and rejected of men,” and few things were so likely to cause Him to be thus despised and rejected as that of being considered a Nazarene. You remember, I dare say, that I told you not long ago, that it was quite a proverb among the Jews, “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth ?” And yet this was the city after which the Son of God permitted Himself to be called. Though born at Bethlehem, the birth-place of David, and as such held much in honour, our Lord is continually in the Gospels called, not Jesus of Bethlehem, but “Jesus of Nazareth.”

And here did the Son of the Most High God condescend to spend the days of his childhood, that so he might not receive glory from his circumstances, nor from the place of his abode, but that his divine glory might break forth through all these outward hindrances, as the sun scatters the thick clouds, until all kings of the earth shall one day fall down before Jesus of Nazareth, and all nations do Him service.

I have already had occasion to observe to you, that

of the early history of our Lord the notices in the Gospel are very few. After recording the birth of Jesus, His presentation in the Temple, His manifestation to the Gentiles, His flight into Egypt, and His return to Judea, the sacred narrative seems to hurry on to the period of His ministry, to His miracles, His teaching, His sufferings, His death. But it pauses awhile on one stage in His early life—on one stage, observe, and one only, as if to point it out to our more especial notice. It pauses at the close of our Saviour's childhood, at that period of life, which is, in some respects, the most interesting of all; when the simplicity of childhood remains, while the powers of the mind are beginning to unfold themselves. From His circumcision to this time, and again from this time to His baptism, the Gospels are silent. There is for thirty years a stillness, a silence in the Saviour's history, which is broken, as I have said, only once. But in the circumstances related to us of this part of our Saviour's history we find much for our thoughts to dwell upon, and much which shews that the Son of God cared for children, and left even to them an example that they should follow His steps. Of this you will have an interesting proof in the particulars I am going to tell you, of an event which is related of Him when He was twelve years old. At this time Mary went up to Jerusalem, to keep the feast of the Passover, as she was accustomed to do every year with Joseph; and on this occasion she took the blessed child Jesus with her. There they remained the usual time of the feast, and then set out to return again into Galilee. "But the child Jesus remained behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it;" for it was

the custom of the Jews to perform these journeys in large companies, those who were friends and neighbours going and returning together ; and they thought that Jesus was among the party. Mary and Joseph therefore went a day's journey without any fears about Him ; but at the close of the day they began to feel anxious, and to inquire for Him among their relatives and friends : and when they found Him not, they turned back to Jerusalem seeking Him. Three long days did they continue their search, and great, no doubt, all that time were the sufferings of the tender mother. Sad must have been her thoughts and her fears for the blessed child, lest some evil should have happened to Him, or lest He should in any way have been taken away from her, and she should see His face no more. At length, having sought Him every where else in vain, she turned her steps towards the house of God ; perhaps with some faint hope of finding her lost treasure there ; or, perhaps, merely to seek some relief for her wounded and troubled heart, by pouring out her soul unto the Lord. Happy Mary ! Soon was all her sorrow to be turned into joy. There sat the holy child "in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers." Surely then were fulfilled those words spoken by the Psalmist of old, "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hath God ordained strength." The Temple, you know, was the house of God ; was it then to be wondered that the Son of God should delight to linger there ? Or was it surprising that He, who from His earliest childhood was daily advancing in wisdom, should rejoice in this great

opportunity of listening to the appointed teachers of God's law, perhaps gathering instruction from them, or else communicating it from His own heavenly stores? May not children learn from this to love wisdom and knowledge whilst they are young, and to be seeking continually fresh supplies of it from all their appointed instructors with diligence and humility, remembering how He who came into the world to be the Great Teacher of all truth, condescended Himself to receive instruction from others? May they not learn too, to seek, above all, heavenly wisdom, to love the house of God, and to listen with humble reverence to the reading of God's word and the preaching of His truth, remembering that the ministers of His house are expressly appointed to teach them in the way of salvation?

E. What did Joseph and his mother think, Mamma, when they heard Jesus discoursing thus with those learned men?

M. They were much amazed. They little knew how early and devotedly the mind of this holy child was bent upon studying and performing the will of God; nor did they consider that His heavenly Father had a much higher claim to His time, and His affection, than the best human friends; yea, far more even than His mother. Therefore they inquired, with astonishment, why He had staid so long behind them in the Temple; and His mother said unto Him, "Son, why hast thou dealt thus with us? behold thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing." Listen to our Saviour's reply! He said unto them, "how is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" Just as if He had said, "why search for me any where but here? where should I love to be

so well as with you, excepting only in the courts of my Father's house (for God you know was His Father), engaged in that work, which He has given me to do?" Thus we see that it was, from the very first, the meat and drink of Christ to do His heavenly Father's will: to this, every thing else gave way; for this, every thing else was forgotten; His own convenience, His fondest earthly affections, were never allowed to interfere with His holy zeal for the glory of God. Does not the conduct of our blessed Redeemer, as set before us in this circumstance of His early years, speak loudly to all His followers; to me, and even to you, my child? for none, who can listen with interest to the history of His life, can be too young to begin to serve God, to begin to perform our heavenly Father's will. Does it not call upon us, more strongly than any words could do, to make the service of God our first object; to love Him better than even the dearest friends whom He has given us; yea, better than father or mother, or brother, or sister; and never to allow our most interesting occupations to interfere with that higher and better love which we owe to Him?

But whilst I would urge this upon you most earnestly, do not for a moment think that the holy child Jesus was disobedient, or unkind to His mother, or even to Joseph: far indeed was this from Him. Having gratified in the Temple His love to His Father in heaven, and having made the best use of the solemn opportunity, which the sacred feast of the Passover afforded, for the performance of His great work upon earth, He immediately returned with Mary and her husband to Nazareth, and there submitted Himself to them; thus setting an example to all Christian

children of respectful obedience to their earthly parents, or to those who in any way stand in the place of parents to them. For if the Son of God in His childhood was thus obedient, He whose understanding and wisdom were even then so astonishing, how much more should other children obey, who know so little, and need so much the wisdom and experience of their elders to guide them ! Yes ; He, whom arch-angels worship, condescended to become an example to *children*. Though infinite as God, He submitted to pass as we do, through the slow degrees of human nature in body and mind, from His birth to the full prime of life. He was a *babe* wrapped in swaddling clothes ; He was a *child* subject to parental authority, and to human instruction ; before He became “a *man* of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” For as He was perfect God, so was He “perfect man, of a reasonable soul, and human flesh subsisting.” Accordingly as “the child Jesus grew He waxed strong in spirit.” Being truly *man*, as well as truly the Son of God, He grew, as other children grow ; even His spirit grew daily stronger, as well as His body ; His wisdom increased with His outward growth ; and the grace or favour of God was upon Him : by which we may understand, that the abundant presence of the Holy Ghost was with Him, bestowing upon Him by degrees all those excellent gifts and graces, which shone forth in Him afterwards so brightly. And here let me remind you again, that our Lord is our great example, and that in His early years He is more particularly an example to the young. When they look upon this part of our Saviour’s history, what encouragement will they find in it to pray, and also,

by their own endeavours, to strive to become daily wiser and better, that the favour of God, and the help of His Holy Spirit, may be with them more and more; that so, as they grow in years, their spirits too may wax stronger and stronger in every thing that is good. And what a comfort it may be to you to think, as you feel more and more your own weakness and sinfulness, that your blessed Saviour was once a child, and therefore can feel for children still! Surely He knows their difficulties, for He took their nature upon Him; and if they do but trust in Him, He will help them in their trials, pity their weakness, inform their ignorance, and carry them lovingly on, from strength to strength, causing the favour of God to rest upon them in all their ways.

Has not the Lord Jesus plainly shown, as well as taught, that children are the objects of his care and love; and that “of such” indeed “is the kingdom of heaven;” since He was Himself a child? Does not His example, still more loudly than His words, proclaim “suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not?” Are not the *lambs* as well as the sheep equally the Shepherd’s care? He lived for all,—He died for all,—He cares for all:—Oh then let children come to this gracious Saviour!

See *Luke* ii. 40—52.

SEVENTH SUNDAY EVENING.

JOHN PREACHING IN THE WILDERNESS.

M. FROM the childhood of our Lord we pass now to his public ministry. But first, we must turn our

attention for a time to John the Baptist, who, as you already know, was to be our Saviour's forerunner or herald, "the prophet of the highest," as his father Zacharias had called him, "to go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways." Accordingly, as the time drew nigh for our Lord's public commencement of his gracious work, John began the duties of his office by preaching repentance to the people, and calling upon them all to forsake their different sins. He told them that they were like trees, to be judged of by their own fruits; that as a tree is known by the kind of fruit it produces, so they would be known by their conduct and character. He also admonished them, that the axe was laid at the root of the tree; by which, we may suppose, he meant, that the great Judge of the world was Himself about to visit the earth, and that every tree, which did not bring forth good fruit, should be cut down and cast into the fire. To those who should really repent at his preaching, John was permitted to give a pledge or outward sign, by baptizing them in the river Jordan, of God's readiness to forgive them, and to wash away their sins.

E. Had there never been any baptism then, Mamma, before John came?

M. Yes, for some such reason as I have been pointing out to you, baptism was customary among the Jews, even before the time of John. And afterwards, you know, our Lord himself graciously adopted baptism to be one of the sacraments of His Church. In the sprinkling of water in that holy ordinance we are reminded how much we need to be cleansed by the precious blood of Christ, which is called in the Bible,

“the blood of sprinkling;” and how willing God is to wash away the sins of those who repent and believe in His dear Son.

But to return to the preaching of John, which is called by the evangelist “the preaching of the baptism of repentance, for the remission of sins.” To such an office as this the habits of the Baptist were strikingly fitted. From his very childhood he had passed his time in the deserts, or less frequented parts of the country, far from the towns, and where there were but few inhabitants. There, in silence and solitude, he grew up under the watchful providence of God, without any earthly parents indeed to care for him, for they are said to have died when he was quite a child; but waxing strong in spirit, being filled with the Holy Ghost, whose gracious influences were now preparing him for the great duties of his future office. Nor did this holy man content himself with retiring from the abodes of men; his whole manner of living was plain and simple. He deprived himself indeed, not only of all the luxuries of life, but even of its most common comforts and conveniences. His clothing—what was it but a rough garb, made of the long shaggy hair of the camel, and fastened round His body with a coarse, leathern girdle?

E. I think that was something like what Elijah wore, Mamma?

M. It was very much the same; for Elijah is said in Scripture to have been a hairy man, and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins. This kind of dress afterwards became somewhat common among the prophets, in imitation most likely of Elijah; and many of the false prophets, as Zechariah tells us, put on

the like appearance of mortification and self-denial, "wearing a garment of rough hair to deceive the people," and make them think that, like Elijah, they were particularly holy.

E. But John did not make any false pretences, Mamma?

M. Oh ! no : he, you know, was filled with the Holy Ghost ; and where the Spirit of God dwells, there will always be a dread and abhorrence of lying, for He is the Spirit of *Truth*, as well as of holiness. If John dressed in so coarse and rude a manner, it was because, like his Lord, he was poor in the things of this world, and had perhaps no better clothing to put on, even if he wished it. Then he led a severe life, as one, whose great business it was to call upon men to mourn for their sins and to subdue their corruptions, by denying those appetites and desires, in the indulgence of which they had been led into sin. Therefore, though John was himself a very holy man as compared with his countrymen, he was directed by the Holy Spirit to set them an example in his own person of even greater self-denial than he expected from his hearers. We can have no doubt that whatever John did in his public character, as a chosen messenger of God, he did it by divine direction ; and as it had been foretold that he should come like another Elijah, to call the Jews to repentance as Elijah did, it was but reasonable that his outward habits and appearance should be like Elijah's ; so as more strongly to remind his countrymen, that the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord, spoken of by the prophet Malachi, was now at hand.

The food of St. John, like his clothing, was of the

simplest and coarsest kind ; being such alone as the deserts afforded,—wild honey, with which the woods of Canaan abounded, and locusts, which are a kind of insect like a grasshopper, that is commonly eaten to this day in different parts of Asia and Africa, being first stripped of its wings, and then hung up in the air to dry. These insects abound on the banks of the Jordan, where John lived, and would furnish an easy supply of food to one whose taste was so simple, and whose wants so very few.

E. Did the Jews like the preaching of John the Baptist, Mamma ?

M. The interest which it excited among them was very great ; and great too the respect, with which he was received. Crowds of persons, of all ranks and descriptions, flocked into the wilderness to see him. Even from Jerusalem did they come and all Judea, as well as from the country round about Jordan ; and all of them, without any difference, did John call upon to repent and bring forth fruits worthy of repentance. The Pharisees and Sadducees for instance, who came not so much to learn, but rather like vipers to do him some secret hurt, he rebuked openly for their hypocrisy, and false pretences of piety ; and reminded them of God's approaching vengeance if they did not repent, and speedily change their ways. The people in general he entreated to be kind one to another ; the publicans or collectors of the public taxes, he called upon to do their duty without injustice or hardness of heart, these being the sins into which they were most tempted to fall. The soldiers likewise, when they asked him what they were to do, were instructed to show violence to no man, neither to bring

false charges against any, in the hope of being gainers themselves, but to be content with their regular pay and allowances.

Thus did John solemnly call upon all to repent; thus did he faithfully instruct all in their duty, not allowing himself to keep back the truth from the fear of any, or to smooth matters with the view of pleasing any amongst his hearers, however great or powerful some of them might happen to be, but suiting his directions simply to the case of all, so as to meet the various circumstances of the different persons who gathered thickly around him. Such teaching, supported as it was by his own holy example and extraordinary indifference to the things of this world, had great weight with the people; they saw plainly that he asked nothing of them, but what he was ready to do himself; and they all “counted John as a prophet,” and “were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.” Shall we not receive instruction from this, my child? Shall we not learn, that if we would persuade others to know and love God, we must let them see that we do so ourselves; that we earnestly strive to obey His laws, and submit to His will in all things, remembering always that *actions* speak much more loudly than words, and will have much more influence in those around us. By our holy lives we must convince men that we are the servants of Christ; then we may hope to find them willing to listen to our words.

So great, indeed, was the respect which the Baptist excited in the minds of the people, that they began to wonder whether he was not the Christ, their long expected Messiah, the promised Deliverer of Is-

rael. But not for a moment would John allow them to fall into so serious a mistake : not for a moment would he take his Master's place. His desire was by his preaching to lead his poor sinful hearers to Christ, by whose help alone they could really obtain that remission of sin, and those fruits of righteousness which he had been urging upon them. Not for worlds would he have allowed his followers to depend upon any human being for salvation ; no, not even upon himself, though he had been set apart to God from his very birth. He told them that he did indeed baptize them unto repentance ; he sprinkled them with water, to show how much they were defiled with sin, and how much they needed washing ; but he did it in expectation of One, and in dependance upon One, far greater than himself, in comparison of whom he indeed was nothing. Yea so great was John's humility, so deep his sense of his own sinfulness, that he declared to all the people, that he was not worthy even to stoop down to unloose the sandal of the expected Saviour, not meet to perform for Him the very meanest office. Hear his own words, for they are indeed well worth hearing : "I indeed have baptized you with water ; but there cometh One mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose." To Him at once the Baptist directed the thoughts of his hearers, as the proper object of their hopes and of their faith, yea, and if they would not believe, of their terror too, and in the plainest language did he declare this to the people. "I, indeed," said he, "baptize you with water, but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire. Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his

floor, and gather the wheat into his garner, but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable." Striking and awful words! Let us try to understand them. John, you see, could do no more than baptize with water, to bring his followers to a sense of their guilt in the sight of God, and show them how much they needed cleansing; but Christ was able and willing to baptize them with the Holy Ghost and with fire: that is, He was to give His Holy Spirit to cleanse and purify the heart, and that not only as water cleanses the outside, but "as the fire purges out and consumes the dross that is within, and melts down the metal cast into it," making it soft and ductile, and easy to be moulded into a fresh shape. Our hearts, you see, are compared by the Baptist to the metal which is mixed at first with much rubbish, and less valuable substances; but the fire is to consume all these, and leave only the real, pure metal behind. Now as the fire acts on the metal, the Holy Spirit, which Christ will give, acts on the heart of man. He will purge away by His blessed influence, whatever defiles that heart and makes it impure and unholy; and He will soften and prepare it, and make it altogether new.

E. I think I quite understand it, Mamma; and now will you tell me what those other words meant which seemed to me so strange and difficult? I mean about the fan, and the garner, and that dreadful fire.

M. John you see could only preach to the people, and call upon them to forsake their evil ways; but Christ was to separate between the evil and the good, as the husbandman separates the chaff from the wheat. The Jews did this by means of a winnowing fan or

shovel, with which the wheat and chaff were thrown together against the wind, so as to scatter away the chaff while the wheat remained on the threshing floor. After this, the cleaning of the wheat was completed by sifting it in a sieve, which caused the dust to pass through, and the remaining chaff to come to the surface, and be blown away, and so left the wheat alone, clean and fit for use. Thus Christ would thoroughly purge His floor; or cast out of His Church the unbelieving and impenitent. "John could only promise the righteous that it should be well with them, but Christ can keep them safe for ever. He will gather the wheat into His garner; gather His faithful people into His heavenly garner, where they will be sheltered safely for ever. John could only threaten the hypocrites around him, and tell them that, like barren trees, they should be hewn down; but Christ could cast them into the fire unquenchable, which should burn for ever." John, you see, was placing himself altogether in contrast with Christ, whom he would thus clearly point out, as at once able to take away their sins, or most awfully to punish them.

Already were the Jewish people looking for their Messiah, as the prophets had long taught them to do; but it remained for John (so God had expressly appointed it) to lead the people to look for His immediate approach, by calling upon them to throw away their sinful practices, and to believe on Him who was coming. Nor was this all. The baptism of John was to be the very occasion or opportunity of making known to the Jews, not only the coming but even the person of the Redeemer. Yes, at that moment

there stood among them, as he told them, one whom they knew not, but who was indeed that very Christ of whom they had been thinking.

E. What, Mamma ! Do you mean to say that our Saviour was really amongst those people whom John had been baptizing, and who were then listening to his words ? Oh, how glad I shall be, if we have got back to Him again !

M. Yes, Edward ; Our blessed Lord was, even then, among those listening crowds ; He had left Galilee, where He had hitherto lived, and now came amongst the multitudes who flocked to the preaching of John, and there presented Himself with them to be baptized in the river Jordan.

What infinite condescension was this ! He who knew no sin, comes to be baptized, as if like us He had sins which needed to be washed away !

E. What could John think of that, Mamma, when he had just declared that he was not worthy to untie His sandal ? How, then, could he be fit to baptize Him ?

M. Greatly was John astonished, when he saw his Divine Master approaching with the crowd of sinners, who so deeply needed cleansing. He even drew back when the holy Jesus approached, and refused to baptize Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized of thee ; and comest thou to me ? But Jesus said, Suffer it to be so now ; for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." By which we understand that He was unwilling to neglect any ordinance of God, however unnecessary it might be in His case ; for He had come into the world expressly to do in every thing His Father's will. May we not learn from this

to regard with the greatest reverence, and observe with the utmost care, every command of God, even though it seem to us to be such as we think we might omit without any danger? Such my child I grieve to say is the presumptuous manner in which some persons regard the ordinances of the Most High God ! How differently did our blessed Saviour act, when He came all the way from Galilee to Jordan expressly for the purpose of being baptized by John, and how great was His self-humiliation in this act ! but it could not conceal His glory. No ; His very humility led to a greater degree of glory, or rather to make that glory more fully known. He did indeed abase Himself, taking as it were the place of sinners ; but God exalted Him. For no sooner was He baptized, than the heavens opened, and the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape, like a dove, upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, “ Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” It is not an angel that now comes to bear witness to Christ. The Father and the Holy Spirit give direct testimony to the Son. Christ enters upon His work, not in His own name only, but in the name of all the persons of the holy, blessed, and glorious Trinity.

Thus publicly anointed, as it were, with the Holy Spirit for the discharge of His office as the Christ, our Lord was immediately led up by some powerful influence of the Spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted of the Devil.

Meanwhile, so great and so general was the interest excited by the proceedings of John the Baptist, and more especially perhaps by what had happened at the baptism of Jesus, that the Jews, that is, the public au-

thorities or great council, sent messengers to John, to ask him who he really was. Then John immediately confessed, and denied not, but declared plainly that he was not the Christ. Far was it from his inclinations to take to himself any of that honour which belonged to the Son of God, or to take advantage of the respect which he had gained from all ranks of men, to pass among them, even for a time, as their expected Deliverer, or for any thing else, but what he really was. No; he was not, he told them, the Christ; nor was he, as some of them thought, the prophet Elijah returned to earth once more, however much he might be like him in spirit and power: nor was he again, as others supposed, the great prophet, whom Moses had foretold that God would one day raise up to His people Israel. He was nothing more, he said, comparatively, than a voice. "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord;" a voice, indeed, spoken of centuries before by the prophet Isaiah: yet only a voice; calling upon the people to prepare for One infinitely greater, who was quickly coming after him, nay who had even already been publicly baptized of him, and was somewhere even then, as he supposed, in the midst of them. The next day after he had given this testimony, John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith to the people, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." He had already preached repentance; he had already given to the penitent, at the waters of Jordan, a pledge of God's willingness to wash away their sins; instructing them at the same time to believe on Him that should come after. He now points out to them that blessed person plainly, and speaks of Him

expressly as their true peace-maker with God, the Lamb of God typified or pointed out in the lambs that were offered up in sacrifice according to the law of Moses, and even from the time of Abel; the true sacrifice who should take away the sin of the world.

E. But, Mamma, do you think the people knew what John the Baptist meant when he spoke of the Lamb of God?

M. I think there must have been many around him who quite understood that he was speaking of the long promised Redeemer. You must remember that for many hundreds of years the Jews had been in the daily habit of offering up a lamb to the Lord, morning and evening, as a sacrifice for His people Israel. Thousands and tens of thousands of lambs had thus been offered; and in them every faithful Jew had learnt to see a type of a far more holy and precious sacrifice one day to be offered for the sins of the world. But above all the paschal lamb, which was solemnly offered up once a year at the Passover, would keep the Jews in mind of some great sacrifice for sin which the holiness of God required, and which the merciful wisdom of God should in due time ‘provide:’ as was even before the law more strikingly intimated to Abraham, when he offered up his only son in the place called “Jehovah Jireh,” that is, “the Lord will see or provide.” The words therefore which John spoke would be plain and easy to be understood by all who were inclined to believe them, and most welcome to all who felt their need of such a sacrifice: such persons would see at once in this Lamb of God whom John pointed out to them, that precious Saviour who had been promised from the beginning of the world.

It was to his blood that the baptism of John was intended to lead the thoughts of the people. More than once did the Baptist thus speak of Christ, as the Lamb of God; for it was his humble and holy delight not to seek his own glory, but that of the Son of God; to send men from himself to his divine Lord; yea, even to send away his own disciples, that they might become followers of Christ. John well knew that neither he nor they could find salvation any where but in Him; for there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we may be saved, but only the name of Christ Jesus our Lord. If John the Baptist looked for pardon only to the Lamb of God, how much more should his disciples, and how much more should we, Edward, place our hopes of forgiveness in Him, and in Him alone!

See *Mark* i. 1—11. *Matt.* iii. *Luke* iii. 1—22. *John* i. 19—36.

EIGHTH SUNDAY EVENING.

OUR LORD TEMPTED IN THE WILDERNESS.

M. You will remember, Edward, that, in our last conversation, we noticed that our blessed Lord, immediately after His baptism by John, was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted of the Devil. We did not at the time stop to enter into that most extraordinary and mysterious event in our Redeemer's history, but went on to show how the Baptist bore witness to Christ, first to the Jews at Jordan, and then to his own disciples, after our Saviour's return from the wilderness.

E. Do you mean when John saw Jesus coming, and said to his disciples, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world?"

M. I do; and now I must take you back to the account of the Temptation which the Gospels contain, and in which, though so strange a transaction, we shall find much to instruct, as well as interest us.

There is, you know, my child, a great enemy of the human race, called Satan, or the Devil; who is said in Scripture to go about "like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." He it was, who, in the form of a serpent, tempted our first parents, and brought death into the world; whence he is called "that old serpent," "the father of lies," and "a murderer from the beginning." He it is who still prompts the wicked to do evil, and tempts the righteous to forsake the commandments of their God. One main object of our Lord's coming into the world was to destroy the works of this evil spirit, and, as it was said of him in prophecy, to bruise the head of the serpent, who had wrought so much evil in a world which God made at first "very good." We need not therefore be surprised to find that the first thing related of our blessed deliverer, after His baptism in Jordan, should be an awful conflict with our great spiritual enemy. Up to this hour, the temptations of the evil one had been but too successful with mankind. Thousands, Edward, nay millions had sunk under them; and but few had passed through them unhurt. But it was not to be always so. Man at length, in the person of Jesus Christ, was to triumph over the tempter. Our Lord is led into the wilderness to be tempted; and it is the Spirit of God that leads Him thither. What created

spirit, however subtle, shall dare to make trial of his wiles in such a case, against such a Being? Yet so great was the malice of Satan, that he ventured to assail even the Son and the Spirit of God! It is an awful history, my child, and one to make us tremble as we read: but it may be a most profitable one, if it only teach us to fear as we ought this dreadful being, to watch lest he obtain possession of our hearts, to fight manfully against the temptations which he throws in our way, and to engage in our behalf the help of that gracious Saviour who underwent for our sakes this conflict with him.

We said that he ventured to assail the Son of God! but it was only ignorantly, or madly, to rush on to his own confusion. For none but God, and those who are taught of Him, are truly wise. The most crafty of wicked beings do in reality pursue a course not less foolish than it is evil. Satan proceeds to tempt even the Son of God. And here I would have you observe that neither the greatest privileges, nor the highest degrees of holiness save men from trial. Neither His own purity, nor the Holy Ghost descending visibly upon Him, nor the voice of the Father declaring Him to be His "beloved Son" exempted our Lord from being tempted. How then can His followers expect to escape? All those circumstances which would seem to us to cast a shield around the person of the Redeemer rather provoke, than overawe the hatred of Satan. They lead to the conflict, instead of preserving Him from it. The glorious baptism of Jesus is followed immediately by His long and trying temptation!

For our Saviour remained in the wilderness forty days, being, during the whole of that time, as St. Luke

relates, "tempted of the devil." In what this part of the temptation consisted, we are not told. All we know is, that He was in the midst of wild beasts; which the tempter perhaps might make use of to terrify our Lord; and that, during the whole forty days, He fasted, or abstained from all food.

E. That is what Moses did, Mamma, and Elijah too, in the wilderness of Arabia.

M. You are quite right: both these distinguished servants of God were wonderfully supported by the divine power, or, as our Saviour has expressed it, "by the word of God," without having recourse to meat or drink for forty days and forty nights. But their fasting was a very different thing from His. They fasted, in order to prepare themselves for more than usual communion or intercourse with the blessed Fountain of all good, for a great and glorious display, such as they had never been privileged to behold before, of the glorious majesty of the Almighty. When Moses fasted, you know he was in the mount with God, and was allowed to behold all "His glory pass before him:" and so it was with Elijah, who on the same mountain was admitted to the same high privilege.

The fasting of Christ, on the other hand, was followed by an awful conflict with the great enemy of God and man; and He used prayer and fasting, and afterwards recommended His disciples to do the same, as the best weapons that could be employed against him; the best means of obtaining, through communion with God, that spiritual strength, by which we may withstand and overcome the wicked one.

When the forty days were ended, Jesus "was an

hungered:" and then Satan began those three temptations, which are recorded in the gospel history. As our Lord had been so long without food, the tempter seems to have thought that he might possibly by means of this hunger persuade Him to act in a manner displeasing to God.

E. I suppose, Mamma, he remembered that it was with the forbidden fruit that he tempted Eve, and that he thought he would try our Lord in the same way?

M. Yes, and he knew also that by means of their appetites, and unlawful desires of different kinds, he had led half the world astray. What had succeeded so well with others, would, he might suppose, succeed even now. Yet, as in the case of Eve, he did not depend merely upon the fruit, however "good for food" or "pleasant to the sight," but persuaded her to desire it, by assuring her that it would make her "wise;" so here, he was not content with trying to prevail upon our blessed Saviour to eat, because He was hungry, but he gilded his temptation over with a call upon His power as the *Son of God*. He did not say, "Since thou art an hungered, command that these stones be made bread," but, "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread."—This is a striking circumstance in this temptation, Edward, and well worthy of our serious attention, for there are many among men, who would spurn a temptation nakedly addressed to their wants or appetites, who are yet, like Eve, easily drawn aside by it, if mixed up artfully with some call upon their pride or vanity. Satan did not dare to say to our Lord, "Thou art hungry, therefore work a miracle for thy support:" but he urges Him to do it, from a regard to

His own glory, to prove Himself to be the Son of God. How little did this evil and malicious spirit know of the real temper and character of the Holy Being whom he was addressing, when he flattered himself that he should take Him in such a snare ! Perhaps he was not aware who Jesus really was, or did he think, that he could persuade Him, for a moment, to regard His own glory more than that of God, or to separate, even in thought, the one from the other ? Did he suppose, that He, who came down from heaven expressly to suffer what no heart could imagine or tongue could tell, would shrink at the very outset under the pangs of bodily hunger, however painful ? Did he imagine that He, who, in taking upon Him our nature, proposed to Himself in all things to “set us an example, that we might follow His steps,” would, at the beginning of His work, teach us to distrust the gracious providence of God ; to doubt for a moment His power, either to provide for our wants, or to support us under them, or that He would teach us to seek to deliver ourselves, by improper means, from the trials He has appointed for us ? Very far would this have been from the temper and character of the blessed Jesus. None of these motives could possibly influence Him to act contrary to His Father’s will ; and His answer shows us, that such a display of His miraculous power would not have become Him, but would in some way or other have been inconsistent with the divine will. Either this was not the place, or not yet the time, to show forth His wonderful works ; or at all events Satan was not the person, for whose satisfaction they were to be wrought. He who on another occasion, as you will hear by and bye, refrained from working mira-

cles, to gratify the curiosity of Herod, was still less likely to perform them, at the bidding of the wicked one. The miracles of Christ were for a public sign, not to devils, but to men, of the power of God accompanying His gracious Gospel; but here were no men to be convinced; nor was the direct preaching of the gospel as yet begun. In the solitudes of the wilderness our Redeemer was preparing Himself for His great work, by commencing His victories over that malicious spirit, whom He came, not to convince, but to conquer; not to save, but to destroy. The only answer therefore, that He vouchsafed to this temptation, were a few simple words from the sacred scriptures; “and Jesus answered him saying, It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”

E. I should like quite to understand what our Lord meant by those words.

M. It was just as if He had said, that He need not make those stones into bread, in order to satisfy His hunger, or support His life; for God had many ways of providing for the wants of man, besides those which He generally makes use of. How had He fed His people Israel for forty years in the wilderness, when there was no bread to be had? did He not cause the very heavens to rain food for them? had He not sent bread to His prophet Elijah, during the famine of Israel, by means of the ravenous birds of the air? and had He not, by His blessing, made a little pulse and water more nourishing to His servant Daniel, “than all the portion of the king’s meat?” If food were really necessary for the support of the body, God had a

thousand ways of supplying it; but He could also, if He chose, support life without it. "The breath of His mouth, the word of God, the light of His countenance, the refreshment of His promises, any one of these might be made sufficient to supply our necessities;" how had our Saviour Himself been supported for the last forty days? not by bread, but by the word of God, by meditation on that word, and communion with God by it; and in like manner He could live still, if it were the will of God, although "He began to be an hungered." Let us never forget this answer of our Redeemer to the temptation set before Him by Satan. Let us remember it, my child, to our comfort, if ever in distress or difficulty of any kind we feel inclined or tempted to deliver ourselves by improper means, instead of placing our trust in God, instead of asking ourselves what course of conduct would be most pleasing to Him; and waiting patiently His time for delivering us.

There may be many occasions, amid the changes and chances of this troublesome world, when it may be most valuable and important to us in one way or another to remember the lesson taught us here: short and simple as it seemed to be, it completely baffled the great deceiver of mankind. "It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

The second temptation, as related by St. Matthew, was as follows: "Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee; and in their

hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone."

The tempter, you see, finding that our Lord was not to be persuaded to do wrong, by the appetites of the body, or the wants of His human nature, no longer tries to succeed by these, but changes his attack altogether. He now tries one of a more purely spiritual kind; he urges Him to give a striking proof of being the Son of God by throwing Himself down from one of the pinnacles of the temple, and to trust in God to preserve Him, by His angels, from all harm; reminding Him that God had promised, in that same word from which our Saviour had answered him before, to give His angels charge over them that trusted in Him. This pinnacle, or wing of the temple, on which Satan had placed our blessed Lord, is supposed by some to have been a part of the roof of one of its courts, or rather the gallery or parapet on the top of the buttresses which surrounded the roof of the temple. But others say, and perhaps with more reason, that, as the temptation of Jesus was to throw Himself down among, and before the eyes of all the people then at worship in the temple, to prove in this way that He was the Son of God, that it could not have been from any part of the high roof of the temple, nor from the outer part of it at all. It is much more likely to have been in some more accessible part, to which there was probably a passage by stairs, though, of course, at a sufficient height from the ground, to have placed His life in the greatest danger. In order to persuade Jesus to do this, the devil, as you see, quoted a verse from one of the psalms; for he is not ignorant of scripture; even he can quote it, when it

is likely to serve his purpose. He saw that it was with "the word of God," which is called in the Bible "the sword of the Spirit," that our Lord had defeated him the first time; and he now attempts, as it were, to wrest this heavenly weapon from His hands. But remember, my child, that it is not a careless use of the mere words of scripture that can be of any real service to us. A perverse application of holy writ is a very different thing from a humble and reverent appeal to its real meaning. If carelessly used, it may be made to teach the very reverse of what is really intended; especially if we take a verse here and there, as it stands alone, without comparing it with any others, to see what they altogether teach. It was exactly thus that Satan went to work, although in his case not from mere carelessness, but with a decidedly wicked purpose. He chose a verse, intended by the Spirit of God to comfort and encourage those who place their humble trust in God's protecting care, in any dangers or distresses which His providence has appointed for them; dangers which lie in the way of their duty, and which they could not avoid, without turning aside from that only path of safety and peace. How consoling to the righteous in such dangers, to see it written in God's own word, "He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways!" But, in the hands of this wicked being, the gracious promise was perverted into a reason for rushing without any cause into danger, and presumptuously trusting to the merciful interference of God, in unnecessary perils of our own seeking. With poor sinful man such a temptation might have succeeded; in a moment of weakness he might have been deceived;

but with the Son of God this perversion of scripture could not for a moment prevail. “Jesus answering, said unto him, It is written again, thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.” Observe the wisdom of this reply. He is not driven from holy scripture, because an evil being can make an evil use of it, but brings out of its sacred treasures another sentence which completely defeats this wily adversary: He refers to a command of God, expressly forbidding us to tempt His providence, by expecting His help in dangers or difficulties which we have made for ourselves. Already had our Lord shown His readiness to trust God, when He refused to work a miracle for His own relief, under that great extremity of hunger, which He had suffered in the wilderness, whither He was led under the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit. He was not, however, to be persuaded to carry this confidence beyond its proper bounds. With mere human beings the devil might have found this an easy task; for men who are on their guard against vice are often ruined by their virtues. They carry them to excess, and so destroy themselves. Our very best doings indeed are never what they ought to be. We are inclined to extremes in every thing, and are continually either going beyond or falling short of what is right; the truth of this you will soon learn, if you watch your own heart, and examine carefully your own conduct, comparing it with the word of God, which is the only safe rule by which to guide ourselves. But it was not thus with our blessed Lord, His obedience was altogether perfect, as far removed from excess as from defect. He would trust God,

even when nature failed Him; but would not tempt Him with one unnecessary danger.

E. How disappointed the evil one must have been, Mamma, when he found a second time that he could not persuade Jesus to do wrong! I think he would not try any more?

M. Though twice defeated, the tempter is not abashed. He renews the attack, only in a fresh form. He no longer urges Christ to a rash display of His heavenly rank, nor does he now propose to Him a morsel of bread to satisfy His hunger. No; he goes to work quite in a different way, one, in which he might think himself still more sure of success. Remembering, perhaps, the prophecies of the great kingdom which was to be set up under the Messiah, he makes Christ an offer of the whole world,—all its kingdoms, and all their glory; and to make the temptation more powerful, more difficult, as he thought, to resist, he contrived to bring all these kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, before our Saviour's view in a moment of time, from the top of an exceeding high mountain to which he took Him.

E. But, Mamma, how could he do that? There is no mountain in the world, I am sure, from which all its kingdoms can be seen.

M. I cannot tell you, Edward, *how* this was done, nor yet how the tempter took our Saviour from the wilderness to the temple at Jerusalem; as the Scripture, which relates to us the facts, does not describe the manner of them. There is no doubt that it was preternatural, that is, out of the common order of things; and that the devil, who is a mighty spirit, though a

created and fallen one, was allowed on this occasion to use his great power ; although God does not permit him, in general, to disturb the regular course of nature. We must look upon the whole transaction as altogether extraordinary or uncommon ; permitted for a very unusual purpose, the tempting of the Son of God ; and we are not to be led from it to suppose that any thing of the same kind has occurred at other times, or is likely to occur again. We are very sure that all created beings are under the control of the one great Creator ; and we must not think that He will permit evil spirits, just when they please, to fill us with terror and uncertainty, by disturbing the universe which He has made, and which He upholds continually by the word of His power. But we must return to the temptation itself.

E. Yes, dear Mamma, I want to know what Satan wished to tempt our Saviour to do now : you said that he shewed Him all the kingdoms of the world, and offered to give them to Him, with the glory of them : I am sure he must have hoped now to persuade Jesus to do something very wicked ?

M. Indeed he did ; he had the boldness to require in return, that our blessed Lord should fall down and worship him ! At no less a price than this was he willing to part with all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them. Hear the insulting offer in his own proud words ! “ All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.” What a tempting prize, however, to most men would that be, which was here offered to our Lord ! How few, indeed, are there, who are proof against the temptations of the *world* ! It requires not kingdoms and

their glory to lead men astray : how often will an empty title, or a little praise and applause, or a few acres of land, or a few thousands, or hundreds, or even tens of gold and silver be quite sufficient ! For these, men are continually selling themselves as it were to Satan, to do his works—the works of sin ; and to engage in his service—the service of disobedience. Think, for instance, of Balaam, whom an angel could not stop, when a house full of silver and gold had been placed before his hopes by the king of Moab ; of Achan, when he saw the wedge of gold, and the rich Babylonish garment ; of Gehazi, and his miserable falsehoods, for the sake of Naaman's silver.

E. Yes, Mamma, and Judas, who for thirty pieces of silver sold our blessed Lord ; and Ananias and Sapphira, whose sad history you have so often told us.

M. Small temptations have, you see, often served Satan's purpose, of drawing men into his power ; and where trifling portions of the world, or its riches, have not been enough, larger have often been offered, and greater sins committed in return. In the history, for instance, of past times, how frequent are the examples of men “ wading through slaughter to a throne,” and filling the world with crimes, that they might fill it also with their own names, as masters of the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them ! For these ends some have even openly renounced their religion ; and numbers less openly perhaps, but not less surely, have given themselves up into the power of Satan, and have done his pleasure as thoroughly as if they had actually fallen down to worship him. Having all along found such temptations so powerful with

men, he now ventured to try them on the Son of God.

Such, Edward, was the last temptation offered to our Lord, and such the price insisted upon ; when the tempter was permitted to take Him up into that exceeding high mountain, and exhibit to Him the world with its glory.

E. Then, Mamma, our Saviour was taken up into a mountain ? Do you think it was mount Pisgah, from which God shewed Moses all the kingdoms of Canaan ?

M. It might have been to this mountain that the devil conveyed our Saviour, when God allowed him for once to exercise his extraordinary power : from that mountain he might certainly have seen all the kingdoms about Judea ; “ but as to the glory of them,” this was no doubt an illusion, as perhaps, the whole scene may have been,—most likely a mere landscape or picture ; an airy representation, intended only to last a few moments, such as this great deceiver could easily put together ; a bright pageant for a little while, in which he might set forth, in lively colours, the glories and splendours of princes, with their robes, and crowns, and retinues ; the pomps of thrones, and courts, stately palaces, sumptuous buildings, smiling gardens and fields.” Such a show he might have got up, and madly have thought to dazzle with it even the senses of the blessed Jesus : ignorant, perhaps, all the time that he was only showing Him his own works, addressing himself to the very being whose hand had in fact stretched out the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth.

Such, in all probability, was the nature of the last

temptation offered to our blessed Lord;—a vain show; a mere delusion ! And what else in reality, are all the temptations of Satan ? all the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, which he makes use of to accomplish the ruin of mankind ? What else have they ever been, or are they now ? Delusions indeed ! shadows and false colours with which he ensnares to destroy the souls of men : for it is this evil spirit, who dresses them up, and makes them appear so dazzling and so desirable ; “ shows the world and the glory of it, whilst he carefully hides, all the time, the sin, and sorrow, and death which stain the pride of all this glory ; the *cares* and *calamities* which attend great possessions ; the *thorns*, which crowns themselves are lined with.”

E. Is Satan then able, as he says, to give away the power and glory of the world to whomsoever he chooses ?

M. There can be no doubt that it is by crimes, as I have just said, and therefore by the help of this wicked one, that great worldly power has generally been accomplished. The famous conquerors, whom we read of in history, have almost always been as famous for their crimes as for their greatness ; and their conquests have too often been nothing else than robbery and murder on a large scale ; so that we are almost led to suppose, that for once Satan spoke the truth, when he said that these things were his, or, in other words, that he was permitted to use them for the purpose of tempting and trying men ; especially when we find him called, even in Scripture, “ the prince of this world.” At the same time we must not be surprised to hear falsehoods from the father of

lies ; and whatever power he may be permitted to use for a time, whether in advancing wicked men to honour, or in afflicting the righteous, as in the case of the patient Job, of this we are sure, that he can do no more either way, than God is pleased in His providence, for wise ends, though unknown to us, to permit. "For the kingdom is the Lord's, and he is the governor among the nations." "He is the Most High, and ruleth supreme in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will ;" nay more, we know that He has promised to His Son to give Him the heathen for His inheritance, and the utmost parts of the earth for His possession ; yea, to give Him dominion and glory, and a kingdom, that "all people, nations, and languages should serve him," and "all kingdoms become the kingdoms of God and his Christ."

Nothing, therefore, but a wicked and presumptuous boast was it in Satan to attribute to himself the disposal of the kingdoms of the earth, and thus to offer, as it were, his help in erecting the kingdom of the Son of God : a kingdom not of this world, not to be established by worldly intrigue or conquest, not to be sought in the ways of ambition and crime ; but one to be set up in the hearts of men ; whose foundations were to be laid in the piety, and obedience, and sufferings of the Son of God, of the Prince of peace.

But this offer on the part of Satan, with which he had thought at last to overcome the Son of God, was accompanied, as we have heard, with a condition, and that of such a kind, as to show at once from whom it came : "All this will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." If this wicked being could

have known so little of the holy nature of the blessed Jesus, as to flatter himself that he should succeed, how bitterly disappointed must he have been, when he saw the abhorrence and detestation with which his offer was received ! How must the tempter have quailed beneath the indignant look and the awful rebuke of our Lord ! How confounded and ashamed must he have been at the sound of those words, “Get thee hence, Satan; for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.” Baffled and defeated, he was obliged to quit the field, and to retire with shame from the presence of that being, who was now to fulfil the prophecy spoken in the garden of Eden, “He shall bruise thy head, but thou shalt bruise his heel.”

Gloriously had the Redeemer conquered, and now the temptation was at an end. “The devil leaveth him, and behold angels came and ministered unto him.”

The trials of the righteous servants of God, when borne with faith and patience, lead in the end to happiness and glory ; how much more of Him, who is called in Scripture “*the* righteous servant” of God ; the only One truly righteous in Himself; Him through whom alone all the righteousness of His saints or holy people is obtained. The Son of God had been dwelling amongst wild beasts, had been tried with hunger, had been tempted by Satan. He resists, and the temptation is at an end ; and behold heavenly hands minister to His wants, and the angels of God give Him glory.

And now, my dear Edward, let us not forget that in enduring temptation, our blessed Lord is an example to us, and that what is written concerning His

patience and piety, is written for our instruction. Whenever we are tempted to do anything wrong, let us think of Him, and, in imitation of our divine Master, immediately ask ourselves what the Bible declares to be our duty, and make that the guide of our conduct. Yes, let us set its blessed precepts at all times against the inclinations of our own evil hearts, which are never to be trusted; and against the persuasions of others also, which can never be safely followed, if they are in any way contrary to the words of the Spirit of God. Our Lord has shown us how to resist the calls of our natural wants, how to avoid carrying to excess even that which is good, and how to withstand the allurements of an evil world; and we may remember for our comfort, that He who was tempted in all points like as we are, though without sin, is both able and willing to succour those that are tempted. He is now, my child, reigning in heaven; and He is still present with us by His Spirit. He has not, amidst the glories of His heavenly reign, forgotten what He suffered when He took our nature upon Him; He remembers His own temptation, and can feel for us in ours; so that we may look up to Him with comfort and confidence, and firmly depend upon His sympathy and help. We may be sure, beyond any doubt, that, if we boldly resist the devil, trusting in our Saviour's might, he will flee from us as he did from Him. The evil one shall not be suffered to pluck us out of our Redeemer's hands, but His holy angels shall be sent to minister to our defence, and their approving friendship shall be a part of our reward.

See *Matt.* vi. 1—11. *Mark* i. 12, 13. *Luke* iv. 1—13.

NINTH SUNDAY EVENING.

BEGINNING OF MIRACLES.

M. When our Lord had overcome the tempter in the wilderness, He returned again to the place where He had left John baptizing and preaching to the assembled multitudes. We are told that this place was called Bethabara, and that it lay beyond the river Jordan. The word 'Bethabara' means "a place of passage," and it is thought that this village was situated on the Jordan, over against the city of Jericho, and that it was the very place where the people of Israel passed over Jordan into the promised land, led, as you remember, by Joshua. Here John had remained during the temptation, speaking to the people continually of Christ, and bearing witness to Him: and now he beholds Him coming to him from the wilderness, and repeats his testimony to His divine person and character: for John again declares in plain terms to all the people, that this Jesus whom he points out to them is "the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world:" that this is He upon whom he himself had seen the Spirit of God descending, and abiding; and who was come to baptize with the Holy Ghost. Nor was this devoted and faithful messenger of the Messiah satisfied yet with the declarations which he had made concerning Christ; the very next day he took another opportunity of repeating to two of his own particular disciples what he had already so publicly declared. Pointing to Christ, as He was walking at a little distance, he said to them,

“Behold the Lamb of God!” Just as if he had said, “I do not wish you to remain with me any longer; I have hitherto gladly conversed with you, and instructed you, and done what I could for you; but my great object all along has been, not to keep you for my own disciples, but to prepare you to become the disciples of One, who can do for you far more than I can. I may indeed have taught you to see your own sinfulness and to grieve over it, but I cannot give you pardon, or deliverance from it. There is, however, One who can do this; One who has come into our world on purpose to take away the sin of it; to Him you must go for pardon and peace. Behold Him there; yea, ‘behold the Lamb of God,’—that Lamb whom your paschal sacrifice pointed out as the only real sacrifice by which atonement can be made for sin, and man be made at peace with God. He is the Lamb which God has provided from the beginning; and who has now ‘appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself;’ to wash away its *guilt* by His precious blood; to deliver us from its *power* by His Holy Spirit. Do not let me keep you away from Him for a moment; I long to give you over to Him, for with Him you will be safe and happy: behold Him there, ready and willing to receive all who go to Him.” All this we may imagine the humble Baptist to have meant, when he pointed out the Saviour to his own disciples, and invited them to leave him for Christ. And what an example did he here set to all the ministers of Christ’s Gospel! If ever, my child, you should have the honour of becoming one of those ministers, one of the shepherds of Christ’s flock, remember this, I entreat you: remember the Baptist’s

desire to lead his followers to Jesus: remember that this has ever been and must ever be the one great object of all faithful ministers, not to set up themselves, but to lead people to love and adore the Saviour: to persuade them to follow Him, and to submit their hearts to Him: to point Him out to them as “the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.”

E. Ah, Mamma, you know how often I have thought that I should like by and by to be a clergyman, what you call a minister of Christ; and I am sure I hope, if ever I am one, that I shall remember what you have now told me about John the Baptist. I wonder whether his two disciples did leave him and go to Christ?

M. Yes, he did not speak in vain; the Bible tells us that “the two disciples heard him speak, and followed Jesus.”

E. And did Jesus receive them kindly, Mamma?

M. You will not know Him long, before you will find out, that He never sends any away who desire to come to Him! He turned round to John’s disciples, as they were following Him, and said to them, “Whom seek ye?” And when they replied that they wanted to know where He dwelt, He graciously invited them to “come and see;” and they returned with Him to His own home, and staid with Him all that day. Humble, no doubt, and poor was that home, but it was the dwelling of the Redeemer; and when once they had been admitted into His blessed society, they were unwilling to leave it, and most glad to be permitted to remain. And here we have an interesting circumstance related to us concerning one of these disciples

of John whose name was Andrew. Not contented with the happiness of having become acquainted with Jesus Himself, he went to seek for a brother of his and brought him also to Christ.—“the best proof he could have given of his love to his brother!” This little incident is a very beautiful one, and well worthy of our notice. Let us learn from it how we may best show our love for those who are near and dear to us; remember how Andrew showed his: “he brought him to Jesus.” If we have been so happy as to have been taught to know and love our gracious Redeemer, let us try to lead others to know and love Him too: let us bring all whom we can to Him, especially those whom we love, the dear companions of our childhood, the sharers of our earliest joys! Let us not only love Christ ourselves, but entreat them to love Him too, that so having had one home on earth, we may live for ever together in our “Father’s house” above. Andrew, as we have seen, went to find his own brother Simon, and telling him with joy that they had found the Messias, or Christ, he persuaded Simon to return with him to Jesus, who graciously received them both, and looking upon Simon, said to him, “thou art Simon, the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas,” which, in the Hebrew language, means a stone.

E. I wonder why our Saviour gave him another name, Mamma.

M. A new name was in those days a sign of favour, and was often given to keep up the remembrance of some kindness or honour bestowed at the time of giving it. You will recollect several instances of this in the Old Testament; particularly how God changed

the name of the father of the faithful, at the time when He made him such great promises, saying to him, "neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham : for a father of many nations have I made thee : " and again how Jacob was called by the new name of Israel. By giving a new name to Simon, our Saviour would keep up in his mind the remembrance of the time, so important in his life, when he first became His disciple, and would also shew His great kindness towards him, in not only receiving him, for a disciple, but thus marking him out as belonging to Himself ; for we only give names, you know, to those whom we consider as our own, as really belonging to ourselves. And here we are reminded, Edward, of the names which we also received, when we were taken to Christ at our baptism ; those names which we call, you know, our christian-names, because they were given to us at the time when we became members of Christ's Church : let them ever bring back to our minds the solemn vows which were then made for us, and continually help us to recollect that we are not our own, but Christ's ; and that we must " never be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified," remembering that we have promised to " fight manfully under His banner, against the world, the flesh, and the Devil, and to continue His faithful soldiers and servants unto our lives' end."

E. You have not told me, Mamma, why our Saviour gave Simon the name of *Cephas* ?

M. This word *Cephas*, or Peter, which is the same in signification, meant, as I have said, " a stone or rock ; " and may partly have been chosen by our Lord to show Peter that he was expected to be " firm and

steady in his Christian profession, full of courage and constancy ;” though there was another reason, which we shall find explained as we go on.

Our Saviour had now, you see, three disciples, the two who came to Him from John, and Simon, who was brought to Him by one of them. The name of the other disciple of John the Baptist, who had followed Christ with Andrew, is not given to us in the sacred narrative ; but it is thought to have been the very St. John who wrote the Gospel in which this little history I have now been telling you, is given ; the same who is commonly called St. John the Evangelist.

We must now, Edward, follow our blessed Lord’s steps into Galilee, where we are told that He proceeded the next day ; adding, as He went, to the number of His disciples. For we hear of His finding Philip ; to whom He gave from His own lips an express command to follow Him. This was a great privilege, to receive directly from the Son of God the blessed invitation, “Follow me :” but it was not a privilege which Philip desired to keep to himself : he was forward to share with others the mercy he had experienced. He accordingly finds Nathanael, and tells him that he had found in Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph as he was called, that great deliverer whom Moses and the prophets had all along by their writings led the Israelites to expect. Nazareth, you will remember, was a city of very mean repute ; and Nathanael, full of the prejudices of his countrymen, answered Philip, “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth ?” little thinking that from that despised town *He* should come who ought to be, and will one day be, what the prophet Haggai called Him, “the

desire of all nations." So dangerous a thing, my dear child, is prejudice ; by which I mean a hasty decision of a question, and that sometimes, as in this case, a question of the deepest importance, from some previous notions or feelings which we have taken up upon very slight grounds, or perhaps we hardly know why, and which are often, as in this instance, full of error.

But though prejudiced for the time against Christ, on account of the supposed place of His birth and residence, ~~Nathanael~~ Nathanael was a sincere and good man, and was soon led to lay aside his own false impressions, and to acknowledge Jesus of Nazareth as the true Messiah. True he was an Israelite, and as such he had learnt some of the errors of his people, as well as a value for the promises made to their fathers ; still he did not seek for the fulfilment of these promises, in the way of deceit, nor wilfully shut his eyes from the light ; in him was no love of error, no wish to continue in it, no anxiety to escape from the truth, by idle excuses, but, on the contrary, a hearty desire to know and follow it, wherever it was to be found.

E. I am so glad to hear that, Mamma, I was quite afraid, from his answer to Philip, that he would not let Philip tell him any more about Jesus. How did Philip persuade him that what he had told him was true ?

M. In a very simple, but a very wise manner. Instead of disputing with him about Nazareth, he merely said to him, " Come and see : " and Nathanael ingenuously followed the advice of his friend, and accepted his invitation to " come and see " for himself,

whether what he had said of Jesus of Nazareth was not right and just. Nor did he come in vain ; nor was his readiness to learn the truth left without its reward : no sooner did he approach our divine Lord, than he received evidence enough of the truth of what Philip had spoken. For when our Saviour saw Nathanael coming to Him, He said, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile !" Surprised to perceive that he was already known to One who was an entire stranger to himself, Nathanael said unto Him, "Whence knowest thou me ? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee. Nathanael answered, and said unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel !" The whole truth, you see, burst at once upon the mind of this sincere and upright man. He found himself in the presence of One, who could see into his heart, and read his inmost thoughts ; One who could exactly describe his character, and was aware both of his prejudices and of his pious sincerity ; One whose all searching eye could find him out, in his most retired solitudes, and point out to him the very spot, where, perhaps, unobserved by any human being, he had, like Israel of old, been earnestly supplicating the blessing of the God of his fathers. Like Israel too he had prevailed ; for what greater blessing could he receive, than to be thus brought to Christ ; to be thus led, despite of all his prejudices, to know and believe in the Son of God, Israel's true King ! Happy the man, who was enabled so readily to yield to the force of truth ; to cast away in a moment prejudices which had grown up with him, probably, from his childhood,

been strengthened by the prevailing opinions of all around him, and which had been sanctified, as he might think, by his religion. If he now believed, how much would he find to strengthen his faith, and increase his wonder, as he know more and more of his Divine Master ! How gratified must he have felt even now when he heard our Saviour say, in encouragement of his simple and ready faith, “ Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig-tree, believest thou ? thou shalt see greater things than these. Verily, verily, I say unto you, hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.”

E. Exactly, Mamma, what Jacob saw at Bethel !

M. Even so, my child ; like precious faith with Jacob’s was to receive the same reward. Greater things should he see to confirm his faith ; brighter evidence than he had as yet enjoyed ; yea such miraculous proofs of our Lord’s divine power, so great, so direct, so numerous, as if he saw heaven visibly opened upon the Son of man, and the angels continually ascending and descending in the execution of his commands : so that this guileless Israelite, awakening now out of that spiritual slumber which he had so long been sleeping, with the prejudices of his country, hard and unyielding like “ the stones of the place,” “ for his pillows,” might say, as Israel himself said when he awoke from the vision of the heavenly ladder, “ Surely the LORD is in this place ; and I knew it not.”

E. Mamma, what an interesting story this has been ; Jesus seems as if He loved Nathanael, and I feel as if I loved him too !

M. His character is a very pleasing one, and the approbation, which it received from Christ, may teach us, that real sincerity and uprightness of heart are qualities very precious in his sight, and when accompanied, as in this case, with simple and ready faith in Christ, are sure to be rewarded by Him. But whilst we feel, as we must do, the beauty of Nathanael's character, let us not forget to love and admire, far more, the character of our blessed Redeemer. How brightly does it shine forth in this little history ! how sweetly and encouragingly does it address itself to our hearts ! First, let us observe, how His all-seeing eye is over us continually, and that not merely to observe our failings, and wanderings from Him, our prejudices and objections to receive Him as our Lord, (and truly this, my child, is a very serious thought,) but how lovingly it follows us also, and how readily, and gladly it perceives any sincere desires and right thoughts towards Himself ! how cheering it is to think that this compassionate and indulgent Saviour is ready to receive our first approaches towards Him, that He sees us in our most secret retirements, and hears us when we pour out our prayers before Him ; and that even, when no other eye can follow, and no other ear can hear, He still is near at hand, to observe and to bless us. And though our faith may be but small and weak at first, yet may we be very sure, that if we have but a real desire to find and know Him for ourselves, He will reveal Himself more and more unto us, and give us continually fresh reason to rejoice in the knowledge of His great salvation. See how He encouraged the faith of His new disciple Nathanael ! how He promises him further helps, and

means whereby to increase that faith, than he had ever yet received ! equally ready is He now to encourage the very beginnings of faith in the hearts of His people, and to furnish them with further means of knowledge, when they shall have wisely improved what they have already received ; never, no never will Christ be wanting in mercy to us, if we are not wanting to ourselves.

Philip, who led Nathanael to Christ, came from Bethsaida, a town on the shores of the sea of Galilee, and Andrew and Peter were also from the same place ; but Nathanael seems to have belonged to Cana, an inland town of Galilee. The next event noticed in the sacred history, is a marriage feast at Cana, where our blessed Lord performed His first miracle. For the hour had not yet arrived, but was fast approaching, which our Lord in his wisdom had fixed for the beginning of those wonderful proofs of His power, which He had just told Nathanael that he should soon behold. For the marriage feast occurred within three days of our Lord's arrival in Galilee. It was the marriage, probably, of some relation of the Virgin Mary ; for she is spoken of as being there, as though she had been at home, one of the family party, whilst of Jesus and His disciples, who were also present, it is said, that they were called or invited to the wedding. We may also observe, that the Virgin Mary took a particular interest in all that related to the feast, and was not a little concerned, when she found that there was not sufficient wine for the guests ; so much so, that she went to Jesus, and made known this circumstance to Him, most probably expecting that He would be both able, and willing to

help them. The Jews, being taught by their law, to sympathise in each other's welfare, were much in the habit of coming in numbers to "weep with those" of their neighbours "that wept," and to "rejoice with them that rejoiced;" so that there were probably a great many of them present at this feast, and the wine might soon be exhausted, especially if the bridegroom was not a rich man, as a relative or intimate friend of the Virgin Mary was not likely to be. For though the Son of God was rich in heavenly glory, yet for our sakes He became poor on earth; and His mother belonged, as you know, to a very humble rank in life. It is not then to be wondered at, that she should feel rather anxious for her newly married friends, whether she merely thought of the respectability of the feast, or of their future comfort. Accordingly she ventured to represent their case to Jesus, and in a manner to urge Him to interfere for their help. But "Jesus said to her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come."

E. Mamma, may I interrupt you a moment? I do not understand how our Lord could answer His mother so. I know there could have been nothing really wrong in it, because He did it; but I do not quite understand it; the words sound to me rather unkind, and, if I might say so, almost rude.

M. So they do, my dear, in English, but I am told it is not the case in Greek, the language in which St. John wrote; as one day I hope, when you are better acquainted with that valuable, and important language, you will be able to explain to me. As to the word 'woman,' I understand that, in Greek, persons of the lowest rank would use it in speaking

to ladies of the highest, even queens; so that, in addressing His mother thus, Jesus could by no means have shown any want of respect. But you must make haste and get on with your Greek; that you may search out these things for yourself, and be better able to enter into the full meaning and beauty of the Scriptures.

E. Is that the use of learning Greek, Mamma: I had no idea there was any great advantage in it; I thought it was only taught in schools to make boys work.

M. Remember, then, that the chief object of knowing Greek, is to be able to read the different books of the New Testament in the language in which they were first written; for although our English translation is an admirable one, having been made with the greatest care by a distinguished body of wise and learned men, still it is impossible that any translation should be quite equal to the original. There are beauties, and even accuracies, which scarcely admit of being translated from one language into another; and the Greek is a peculiarly beautiful and expressive tongue. To translate it, is like conveying the fruits of the south to our northern climate. If you would eat the fruit in perfection, you must gather it on the spot where it grows; which I doubt not you will hasten to be able to do; for when once you have had a taste of it, I will venture to say that you will long for more: but we must go back to our narrative.

We may rest, then, fully assured that our Lord's answer to the Virgin Mary was such as became Him; that is, entirely free from any harshness or disrespect towards His earthly parent. At the same time we

can understand that He might mildly but firmly refuse to allow any human being, even His mother, to dictate to Him or interfere in His wonderful works. There are, indeed, some Christians who have sadly forgotten this truth; and who in their prayers do not scruple to entreat the Virgin Mary even now to command her Son to help them.

E. Do you mean the Catholics?

M. I mean those Christians who are very commonly, though improperly, called Catholics, but who would be more rightly named Romanists; one of whose chief errors is the worshipping of the Virgin Mary, so as even to set her above our Lord. It is far from impossible that this answer of our Saviour to the Virgin may have been recorded in Scripture for the express purpose of guarding us against so very grievous a fault. It may at least answer this purpose, and teach us, whilst through all generations we call the mother of our Lord blessed, as she truly was blessed and favoured of God above all women, yet by no means to make her an object of adoration. Let her be the object only of our *imitation*; for of this she indeed was worthy, being of a most meek and humble spirit, full of reverence for her glorious Son, and ever attentive to His words. Her example seems still to say to us, "Look not to me;" but as she afterwards said to the servants of the feast, "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it."

E. Then she did not go away grieved, as I thought she might by our Saviour's answer?

M. Far from it, for to her, you see, the words must have sounded very differently. She submits, however, at once to the mild rebuke which they contained,

and though in a manner repulsed, reposes fully and meekly in the wisdom of His judgment, and the kindness of His intentions. Favoured persons, indeed, were these, whose marriage-feast was honoured with the presence of such a Guest ! Nor need they fear that He will frown upon their happiness, or discourage any reasonable enjoyment, really suited to the occasion. Surfeiting and excess, rioting and folly, vanity and display, and want of proper moderation, even in our most innocent enjoyments, are indeed directly contrary to the teaching of the Gospel ; and our Lord Himself warns us most solemnly against them : but He has not forbidden a moderate and thankful and cheerful use of those gifts which God has provided for our bodily refreshment and comfort. Christ nowhere bids His disciples seek constant solitude, or cultivate continual abstinence. One would think that those well-meaning but superstitious persons called hermits, so numerous in ancient times, who thought solitude and constant fasting to be the kind of life most pleasing to God, had never read the history of our Lord's presence at this marriage-feast. Here He certainly showed that that it was not displeasing to Him to see the solitary come together, to dwell in families ; on the contrary, how ready was He to provide them, not merely with bare subsistence, but with what should in the first instance do honour to their marriage, and be the means perhaps, of adding afterwards in no small degree to their domestic comfort ! For not small, it appears, was the gift which our Lord on this occasion made to the newly married pair. There stood, we are told, " Six water pots of stone, containing two or three firkins apiece ;" each firkin contained about thirty

quarts, so that the vessels must have held altogether a very considerable quantity. All these vessels were, at the bidding of our Lord, filled with water, even up to the brim : and then He bade the servants draw it out, and carry it to the governor of the feast. But it was no longer water, but wine, and that of so excellent a kind, that the governor of the feast supposed that the bridegroom had been purposely keeping his best wine till the last. But the supply was miraculous: it was the gift of Christ to His entertainers ; a proof of His condescending sympathy in human happiness, and His care not merely for our wants but for our comforts. Above all it was an evidence of His divinity ; a proof that He was the Son of God ; and so His disciples considered it. The Evangelist says, “ This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory ; and his disciples believed on him.” They might now begin, with the eye of faith, to see heaven opening upon our Lord, as He had promised them : and may we too, with some degree of the same faith, trace in this interesting and wonderful story, both the glory and the benevolence of our gracious Lord ! His power, and the condescending exercise of that power in acts of loving-kindness to His creatures ! May we learn from it to trace all our comforts and blessings to Him, and His tender care for our welfare ; to see His hand in them all ; and with His first disciples, may we believe and trust in One so able and so willing to make us happy !

See *John* i. 29—51, ii. 1—11.

TENTH SUNDAY EVENING.

PUBLIC OPENING OF OUR LORD'S MINISTRY AT
JERUSALEM.

M. Our last conversation, Edward, was respecting the marriage feast at Cana in Galilee; in which country our Lord began to collect His disciples, and where, for the confirmation of their faith, He wrought His first miracle. He had not, however, yet entered publicly upon His ministry. His proceedings in Galilee were so far it seems of a private nature: but after spending a few days with His relatives, among whom was His mother, and with His new disciples at Capernaum, a town which you will find near the lake of Gennesareth, or sea of Galilee, our Saviour went to Jerusalem. His chief object in going there was to keep the Passover, and there in the Temple at that solemn feast, when multitudes from all parts were met together, to begin publicly His great work as the Saviour of men. This was the first Passover after His baptism; and if we observe the Gospel history carefully, we shall find that He was present at every celebration of this sacred ordinance, after this, which occurred during His stay amongst men. For it became Him to fulfil all righteousness, and thus to set us an example of a strict observance of all institutions ordained by God, and a diligent attendance in religious assemblies. His first public appearance among the Jews was in the Temple, and it was by His presence and preaching there, that "the glory of the latter house" was, as the prophet Haggai had fore-

told, to exceed so much the “glory of the former.” It had been said also, by another prophet, more than four hundred years before, “The Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his Temple, even the Messenger of the covenant whom ye delight in: behold he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner’s fire, and like fuller’s soap. And he shall sit as a refiner, and purifier of silver; and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.” How remarkably the prophet’s words were fulfilled to a certain extent on this occasion, you will now see. And first, let me point out to you how, in this visit which our Lord now made publicly to the Temple, His coming was “sudden” in the eyes of the Jews. His time had hitherto been spent almost entirely in Galilee; in Jerusalem He was very little known. There might remain some who, thirty years before, had heard the declarations of Simeon and Anna respecting Him; there might be others, who had witnessed His more than human wisdom in His conversation, whilst yet a child, with the doctors in the temple: but eighteen years had passed, even since this last occurrence, and both events might now be well nigh forgotten even amongst those few who had happened to witness or hear of them.

E. But, Mamma, had not John the Baptist made our Saviour very publicly known, when He came to him to be baptized?

M. John indeed, on the banks of the Jordan, had borne a more public testimony to the Son of God;

but our Lord's retirement immediately afterwards, first into the wilderness, and then into Galilee, had removed Him out of the sight, and probably out of the thoughts of the careless multitude. Most sudden, therefore, would His appearance be on this great occasion in the temple, where multitudes from all parts of the world were met together to keep the Paschal Feast. In the next place, He was come to fulfil the prophet's words further in a remarkable manner ! He had said, " Who may abide the day of his coming, and who shall stand when he appeareth, for he shall sit as a refiner, and purify the sons of Levi." Accordingly the first work we find Him engaged in in the temple, is the purifying of it : yes, His first act was " to purify the sons of Levi," who ministered in the temple, from the unrighteous practices which they had introduced into the very house of God, that they might at least offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness, and not one polluted with unholy gain.

E. I do not think I quite understand this, Mamma; I thought they were keeping the Passover; what then were they doing which our Lord did not like ?

M. We read that " he found in the Temple those that sold oxen and sheep, and doves" to the people for offerings to the Lord. It seems to have been in one of the outer courts of the temple, called the court of the Gentiles, a place intended, you know, as a place of prayer, that this public market was held; the excuse for it was, that the people must otherwise with great labour and trouble have brought up their sacrifices with them ; therefore the Levites or priests allowed these things to be sold in that hallowed spot, and required for the offerings such exorbitant prices, as

changed "the house of God into a den of thieves," where people were cheating and defrauding one another.

The priests might have deceived themselves or others, with the pretended excuse that this unbecoming use of the courts of the Lord was necessary; but there can never be a necessity for breaking any of God's commands, nor any reason, however fair at first sight it may seem, that can justify our departing from them. Most grievous and displeasing in the sight of our blessed Lord, was a scene like this! disgusting would such a sight have been to any sincere and pious worshipper, who had come up to the house of God with a mind prepared for its calm and holy services, and sad would it have been to be disturbed with such offensive sounds. What then must the Son of God have felt when He saw His Father's house so shamefully profaned? Filled with concern for His Father's glory, and with holy indignation at the open dishonour done to the worship of His name, He sent away these evil doers, not without an open manifestation of His displeasure: for "making a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the Temple, and the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables," "and said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house a house of merchandize." Nor durst the offenders attempt any resistance; though Jesus stood alone and unknown among them, and they were many; and though the instrument of their correction was only "a scourge of small cords." As the prophet had said, they could not "abide the day of his coming; they could not stand when he appeared:"

so great was His power, not only over their persons, but over their spirits; so awful His presence when filled with indignation at their unholy deeds! This transaction, Edward, leads our thoughts naturally on to that still more sudden coming, and still more awful appearance of Christ, to which no doubt the prophet's words do also, and indeed far more fully, apply; when the Son of God will come again in great majesty to remove out of His Church all the workers of iniquity. Oh! who shall abide that day of His coming? Who shall be able to stand when He shall thus appear? Was there such power and terror in His countenance and speech, here in the temple, in the days of His flesh? Oh! how terrible will His face and appearance be to the impenitent at the great day! How fearful will His iron scourge then be! how terrifying that voice, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire!" May God give us grace, my child, wisely to consider this, and to flee in time from the wrath to come: to take refuge now in the mercies and compassions of this gracious Redeemer; to become His sincere disciples, to follow His steps, and listen to His words; that so we may be able not only to abide that coming, but even to rejoice with humble faith in the appearance of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ!

Astonished at the conduct of our Lord, the Jews demanded of Him some sign, which should prove to them that He had power and authority to act as He had just done, though surely the thing itself was sign or proof enough of His divine power. What was it that made all these profane persons flee before Him and obey Him in a moment? What, but the same

power which had of old made the waves of the troubled sea to give way at His approach? The waters fled at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob; and this unruly multitude, whose fierce and angry passions were far more difficult to control, were driven back when He appeared. And yet the unbelieving Jews venture to question His authority, and to ask a sign of His divine commission to do these things!

E. And did Jesus give them any sign, Mamma?

M. He did not, as they probably expected, perform any extraordinary work at that moment, in order to convince them that He was the Son of God, and therefore had authority in His Father's house; but He vouchsafed to deliver a prophecy of His resurrection; that great sign of the truth of His Gospel which took place about three years afterwards. This was indeed the one great proof that He was to give, that He was the Messiah, of whom it had been foretold, that He should be "bruised," that He should be "cut off," that His body should not "see corruption;" things which were shortly to be fulfilled in Jesus, and so to prove that He was truly the Son of God. He therefore answered and said unto them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will build it up." The Jews were astonished at this reply; for they did not see its spiritual meaning; they thought He spoke of their temple of stone, which had occupied so many years in building, and of which, though they cared not to keep it from unholy use, they were still so proud. But Jesus was not speaking of that building made with hands; He spoke of His own body; that true temple, in which all the glory of the Godhead

dwelt, and of which the marble building on Mount Zion was only a type or figure. Of this temple it was that He told them, that, if they destroyed it, He would raise it up again in three days.

E. I see now what He meant ; He knew, Mamma, that they would put Him to death by and bye, and He knew that He would raise Himself up again on the third day from the dead. But why did Christ speak to them in a way that they could not understand ?

M. To the Son of God, my love, all hearts were open ; He could read their most secret thoughts, and He saw in these Jews, who asked of Him a sign or miracle, no sincere desire to know and believe in Him, but only a perverse delight in thus early disputing His power and in finding fault with His works.

E. Then did our Lord's own disciples understand what He meant ?

M. No, even they seem to have lost an opportunity of becoming more thoroughly acquainted with the character and nature of the Master whom they loved and followed : even they who felt that He had a power which they could not resist, which drew their hearts after Him and kept them continually by His side ; even they did not understand what our Lord meant, until He was risen from the dead ; then, indeed, but not till then, remembered they His words, and received with faith this prophecy of their Divine Master, as well as all those in the Old Testament which foretel both His death and His triumph over the grave : and here, my child, we may learn a lesson of patience, and encouragement to wait upon God. What if you

do not understand all that is now told you of your God and Saviour? What if even the easiest words in which you can be taught, may sometimes seem hard and difficult, whilst the blessed truths they reveal are far beyond your reach; so that you might be often forced to exclaim, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it!" Yet treasure it up in your heart: the time will come, when by God's grace, many a thing which perplexes you now, will become clear and easy; when you will remember again the words which you now only half understand, and, as the disciples did after Christ was risen from the dead, you will, with your whole heart and mind, believe the Scriptures and the words which Jesus has said.

I told you that Christ refused to give these unbelieving Jews the sign which they asked of Him: but during His stay at Jerusalem at this passover He performed miracles, and many from among the assembled multitudes, beholding them, believed on His name. But they only believed in part it would seem, not thoroughly; since our Lord, who knew their thoughts, would not trust Himself to them; because "he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man; for he knew what was in man."

These are the words with which St. John concludes his account of this visit of our Lord to Jerusalem to keep the passover; and they suggest to us some solemn thoughts, which it would be unwise not to dwell upon for a moment. They afford, for instance, another striking proof of the divinity of Christ, displayed in His omniscience; that is, His knowledge of all things, even the heart of man. To Him you

see "all hearts are open, all desires known, and from him no secrets are hid;" He saw at once with what kind of faith it was that these people believed in Him: that they were convinced by the works that He wrought that He came from God, but that they did not open their hearts to receive Him: "therefore he would not commit himself to them;" He would not trust them, nor make Himself more clearly and fully known. Thus we learn that it is not enough to believe in the mere *history* of the Gospel: we may be convinced that all that we read there is really true, and yet we may be "far from the kingdom of God." A real faith in Christ, such as shall save our souls, goes far beyond this: if we do not love the Gospel, because it is full of grace and goodness to a sinful world, it will be of little use to believe that it is true; if our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ does not lead us to follow His example and obey His words, we shall be no better than unbelievers in His sight. If we believe Him to be really the Christ the Son of God, and do not trust our souls to His saving mercy; nor submit our hearts to His ruling power; if we expect salvation from Him, and do not yield a holy obedience to Him, we shall only deceive ourselves, and find in the end that He does not consider us His true disciples. Think of this; think that, at this very moment, your heart lies open to Him, who knows what is in man. If you are old enough to read and admire your Saviour's life, you are old enough to love Him, to receive His blessed doctrines into your heart, and humbly to submit that heart obediently to His service. My great object in going through our Redeemer's history with you, is to lead you to the knowledge and

love of His blessed name. To read His life as a mere history, that you may know what He did in one place, and what He suffered in another, will be of little use to you. If you could trace with your finger on the sacred map all the journeyings of Christ, and point out every spot on which His holy feet have trod, and tell me what He said and did at every place, I should feel but little pleasure, unless I could perceive that, in thus following Him, you had really become His obedient disciple yourself: and that feeling that you are a sinful, ignorant, and helpless child, you were anxious to keep close to Him, and to be a sharer yourself in the vast blessings which you behold Him bestowing upon others at every step.

Could I see this—see you giving up your heart to your Saviour's blessed influences, looking to Him to pardon, and teach, and help you, and trying to imitate His heavenly example in your daily conduct and temper—then I should indeed rejoice that we had read His Gospel together; for I might hope that having begun to tread in His steps whilst a child, you would be enabled, by His Spirit, “to walk in the same all the days of your life.”

See *John* ii. 12—25.

ELEVENTH SUNDAY EVENING.

NICODEMUS COMES TO JESUS BY NIGHT.

M. Among those who believed in Christ when they saw His miracles at Jerusalem, there were some who wanted courage to confess Him openly. Of one of

these we have an interesting account given us by St. John. His name was Nicodemus, and he was a person of some rank and importance, being a ruler of the Jews. He had seen our Lord's miracles, and was in consequence persuaded, that Jesus was a teacher come from God. Accordingly he "came to Jesus by night;" for he wished to obtain a farther knowledge of His teaching, yet was afraid to profess openly what he already believed respecting Him.

E. Then do you think that Nicodemus came to Jesus by night, because he was afraid of the Jews?

M. It is generally supposed to have been shame and fear, that kept Nicodemus from publicly acknowledging his faith in Christ. Full well he knew that such a step would bring upon him scorn and hatred, among the chief priests and Pharisees, as it some time afterwards was very nearly doing; for, being himself a ruler, he was closely connected with them. Alas! how often does worldly rank, which men so much covet, prove one of their greatest hinderances in the way of life! But though Nicodemus was ashamed to become His disciple openly, Christ received him with kindness. He made allowance for his weakness, and condescended at the close of what had been no doubt a wearied day, to set down and converse long and deeply with him on the things which concerned his everlasting welfare. What an instance of the tenderness of our compassionate Saviour! of His readiness to receive, and His unwillingness to discourage, even the weakest of those who would come to Him!

E. How I long to hear what our Lord taught Nicodemus; what a happiness it was, Mamma, to be thus instructed by Christ Himself!

M. Nicodemus was indeed highly favoured in meeting with a teacher, infinitely wise, yet far more gentle, and kind, and patient, than any merely human instructor ever was. But no less happy may we be, if we receive with humble faith and gratitude the instructions that were bestowed upon him. In this remarkable conversation Christ preaches His own Gospel not only to Nicodemus, but to us, and to the whole world; to every human being who shall have the privilege of hearing or reading it.

Nicodemus began by telling our Lord that he knew Him to be “a teacher come from God,” because, he said, “no man can do these miracles, that thou doest, except God be with him.” Here was an open declaration of his faith, as far as it went; but our Lord, knowing the hearts of all men, suited his answer, not to the *words* of Nicodemus, but to what he knew to be his *feelings*. He answered and said unto him, “Verily, verily I say unto thee, except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Christ, you see, tells Nicodemus immediately, and plainly, that to be one of his disciples, and to be received by Him into His kingdom, much more was necessary than secretly and silently to admire his miracles, and to believe that he came from God to teach mankind.

The religion of Christ, my dear child, as you have often been told, is not a mere set of opinions, but a *life*: to become a Christian is to enter upon a new life, or, as it is called in Scripture, to be “born again.” Our natural life begins when we are born into this world, and the beginning of our spiritual is, in like manner, called a spiritual birth. By nature, you know, we are all born in sin, all far from God; not disposed

of ourselves to love and serve Him, but corrupt and sinful, prone to unholy tempers and passions, to evil inclinations and desires, having hearts within us which need to be cleansed, and renewed by the Spirit of God, before they can be pleasing in His sight, or fit for His kingdom. This is a sad truth to dwell upon, but still it is a truth which the word of God declares to us, and which is continually proved by all we see around, and feel within us. If any fancy that this is not the case, it is only because they do not study the word of God, where it is strongly and continually declared, or because they do not examine their own hearts and lives, their own thoughts, words, and actions, which constantly remind us how sinful we naturally are. What indeed is it that disturbs and spoils the happiness even of our pleasant childish years, that makes brothers and sisters quarrel, and children disobey? what but the evil hearts they have within? What, but the same sin that ruined Paradise, and ruined at the same time the whole world? Had not sin been so deeply rooted in our natures, that none but God could cure it, our Saviour would not so solemnly have assured Nicodemus, that unless a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God; cannot belong to that kingdom on earth, nor enter it hereafter in heaven.

Nicodemus was surprised to hear this; he could not understand it; and he answered and said unto Christ, "How can these things be?" how is it possible, he asks, that a man should be born a second time? Our Lord in reply mildly reproved Nicodemus for his ignorance, saying to him, "Art thou a master in Israel and knowest not these things?" and then repeating

the assertion in still stronger but clearer terms, He declares again : “ Verily, verily I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”

In these words our Lord plainly points out the holy rite of baptism, which He was about to adopt as one of the sacraments of His Church : for immediately after giving us an account of this most interesting conversation the evangelist adds, “ After these things came Jesus and His disciples into the land of Judea, and there tarried with them and *baptized*.” It is as if our Saviour meant to teach Nicodemus that to admire Him in secret, and to come to Him by night, was not enough ; that having publicly begun the work of His ministry, He was about to admit believers into the number of His disciples by baptism. To those who should receive Him by thus openly professing their faith in Him, and being baptized in His name, He would give the power and privilege of becoming the sons of God, and send forth His Spirit into their hearts to enable them to look up to God with filial reverence and love : or as the Scripture says, to “ cry unto him Abba, Father.” For it is the Holy Ghost alone which gives the soul its first disposition to newness of life. Baptism is a necessary outward means, generally speaking, of our new-birth ; but the inward cause is always the Spirit of God.

E. Then, Mamma, is every Christian a child of God ? I thought only those were so, who really love God as children do their parents.

M. You ask me, Edward, a very difficult question, or at least one to which it is not easy to return an answer, such as would satisfy even all good men. The

fact is the Bible does not say any thing directly about baptism, excepting as it concerns grown persons; and although we know that it is right and quite according to Scripture to bring little children to Christ in this holy Sacrament, still the word of God does not satisfy mere curiosity, as to the exact effect which it produces on their infant souls. They are received, we believe, into the family of God, and if they do not afterwards show a childlike spirit of love and obedience towards their heavenly Father, the fault is not in want of mercy and grace on the part of God; but either in themselves, or in their education, which is often anything but what a Christian education ought to be. Their natural life, that is, their bodily health, is taken care of; but their spiritual life, the health of their souls, alas! how is it neglected! Hence though children of God still in one sense, until He shall Himself see fit to disinherit them, and cast them out, they are, as the Bible speaks, “disobedient children,” such as some children are even towards their earthly parents; and, alas! how many more towards their Father which is in Heaven!

But, Edward, can you tell me what the Church Catechism says upon this subject? Do you remember what it states to be “the inward and spiritual grace in baptism?”

E. “A death unto sin and a new birth unto righteousness; for, being by nature born in sin, and the children of wrath, we are hereby made the children of grace.”

M. Yes, my dear child, we were then called through our Saviour Jesus Christ, into a state of salvation,—put in the way of holiness and life. We had then a power

given us of becoming in spirit and character the children of God. Would that we did but use these blessed privileges as we ought ! not resting too much upon them on the one hand, nor undervaluing them on the other : but thankfully avail ourselves of them in dependance upon the blood of Christ, of which the washing of baptism is a type ; and on that life-giving Spirit, in whose name also we were baptized. Then would there be more hope that Christians would live and feel, like God's children, and a better prospect of their attaining hereafter to the promised inheritance.

To be born again then is to be born of water and of the Spirit : for as water cleanses our bodies, and washes away every spot or stain that defiles them, so the blessed Spirit of God is able to cleanse and purify our souls. His grace removes every thing that is impure and unholy, every thing that makes them unclean and unfit for God ; and by giving us new desires, new tempers, new thoughts, and new affections, can prepare us for that world where sin can never come.

E. But how are we to know, if we are thus really blessed by the Spirit of God ?

M. The work of the Holy Spirit is beyond our comprehension ; but it may be seen in its effects. Our Lord compares it to the wind which blows where God wills, and we hear the sound of it, and see the effects which it produces ; but which of us can say “ whence it cometh or whither it goeth ? ” How much less shall we attempt to explain in what manner the Spirit of God creates anew the human soul ? His is indeed a mighty power, but invisible except in the blessed effects

which it produces; those graces of the Christian character, which show that we are really living as heirs of immortality.

Deeply important was our blessed Lord's conversation, with Nicodemus, though it would be difficult for you now to enter closely into every part of it; but there are one or two more striking points in it which I should like you to observe most attentively.

Our Divine Teacher, then, went on to instruct him further in those heavenly things, which He alone who came from heaven could clearly reveal. Having taught him that by nature he was so sinful as to need to be made new by the Spirit of God, Christ now spoke to him of the forgiveness of sins, and the life everlasting with God in heaven, which was offered to every one, through faith in the blood of His crucified Son. He spoke of man as dying under the effects of *sin*, that deadly poison which kills the soul. He compared our race to the Israelites when they were bitten by venomous Serpents; and then He led Nicodemus back again to Himself, and explained to him, that as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness to cure the poor perishing people, so He was intended by God to be ere long lifted up upon the cross, "that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

E. I well remember, Mamma, that interesting account of the brazen serpent in the wilderness, and how much I hoped that every one who had been bitten would look to it, and be healed. I remember too that you told me then that the brazen serpent was a type of Christ; but I little thought that our Lord Jesus Christ had himself explained it so.

M. I dare say you remember too what I then said of the poison of sin, from which we have all suffered. The serpents' bite was a fatal poison, which quickly destroyed the bodies of the people; but sin is a far more deadly evil; it everlastingly destroys the soul. From this none but Christ can save us. He was lifted up upon the cross for this very purpose, and was expressly called 'Jesus,' that is to say, *Saviour*, because He should save His people from their sins; and that not from the mere name, but from the thing itself; from the actual poison of our corruptions; from its power and deadly influence within our hearts.

This was the great end of our Lord's coming; not, as he assures Nicodemus, to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved; for he that believeth on him is not condemned: he that really looks to Jesus, to save him from his sins, shall find Him both able and willing to do so. What a blessed truth this is! Such a person shall be healed, as surely as the bitten Israelite revived, the moment he obeyed the command of God, and looked upon the brazen serpent.

E. I hope I shall never be as perverse as some of those Israelites were; for many of them, you know, died, because they did not look on the brazen serpent. I am sure I should like, if I could, to look to Jesus Christ and be saved!

M. I pray to God that you may, my dear child; for though by nature we cannot believe, Christ will Himself give us that faith which shall enable us to look to Him for salvation. And what a salvation shall it be! the cure of the Israelites was nothing, compared to the cure that is offered to us in the Gospel:

this precious Gospel, which Christ preached so fully and so freely to Nicodemus and to us. Their poor dying bodies were saved ; cured by looking to the serpent ; but some sickness or other soon carried them to their graves, from which they had only been preserved for a little while ; but the soul of the believer that is healed by Christ shall never die any more. “ For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” See what we owe to the love of God ! to Him, our Saviour tells us, we must attribute the great salvation that He has wrought for us upon the cross. “ The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.”

Much more might be said upon our Lord’s conversation with Nicodemus, though I have tried to point out to you some of the most important parts of it. He concluded it with a solemn warning against the love of darkness—the darkness of ignorance and sin, and an earnest exhortation to come openly to the light, the blessed light of His Gospel ; and this all those will do whose hearts are right before God, and whose desire it is to be taught by His Holy Spirit, and to be thus made able to walk in newness of life.

M. I see now, Mamma, how very kind the Lord Jesus was, in teaching those who really wished to learn from Him. He did not answer Nicodemus, as He did the Jews, when they asked Him for a sign. I was almost afraid then, that I should never understand Christ’s words ; but I do not think so now, that I have seen how patiently He talked to Nicodemus. He did not even take any notice directly of his coming to Him by night ! How good that was of Him !

M. The more you know of our blessed Saviour, as He is made known to us in His own word, the more you will be astonished by His exceeding kindness and compassion to all who came to Him for help ; by His pity for their sins and infirmities, and His tender regard for their feelings. In the beautiful chapter before us we learn, to our great encouragement and comfort, that He is ever ready to instruct sincere inquirers, and to teach them Himself in the way of salvation. Not one upbraiding word did He speak to Nicodemus ! Shall not this encourage us to go to Christ for wisdom ? To Him who, as the Apostle saith, “giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not ?” Therefore if any of us desire heavenly wisdom, we must ask of Him, for He “has compassion on the ignorant,” and on them who have not found the way of life. He will make the rough and difficult paths of divine knowledge smooth and easy ; the crooked and perplexing plain and straight : He will bear with our dulness, pity our weakness, and everlastingly reward and satisfy our desires after Him.

See *John* iii. 1—21.

TWELFTH SUNDAY EVENING.

CHRIST RETURNS THROUGH SAMARIA.

E. I have been wishing very much to know, Mamma, whether, after his conversation with our Saviour, Nicodemus did not become one of His disciples.

M. It is to be hoped that he profited at once by

what he heard, and presented himself at that baptism, which our Lord now began in Judea, where He staid for that very purpose. We do not indeed hear any more of Nicodemus for some time to come; but we shall meet with him again, and find most clearly, that our Lord did not bestow so much pains on him in vain. At present let us follow our blessed Redeemer himself into Judea, where He came with His disciples, immediately after this interview with Nicodemus. In Judea we are told that He tarried with them, and baptized, and that He now made and baptized more disciples than John. All who wished to be His disciples, were thus openly to acknowledge Him, and thus to receive the promises of his kingdom. This was the appointed gate of entrance into His family; at which the highest, as well as the lowest, were to seek admission; and happy those who were thus baptized; not with water only, but with the Holy Ghost, whose Almighty power creating us anew can alone make us capable of salvation, and enable us to lead a spiritual life. Happy are they still who are thus "baptized unto Christ;" and on the other hand most miserable those who, having been baptized in His name, fall away from Him, and, neglecting His great salvation, draw back, to the everlasting ruin of their souls.

When our blessed Lord began thus publicly to teach, He set aside the baptism of John, which was soon after discontinued; just as the stars disappear at the approach of day. St. John indeed knew that, as Christ increased, he must decrease. Nor did he grieve at this result, but rejoiced greatly, as a faithful servant rejoices in the coming of the master, whose approach he has been sent to announce; or as the friend of one

newly married, as was the custom among the Jews, prepared diligently for his reception, looked with eager expectation for his arrival, and at length rejoiced greatly to hear the voice of the bridegroom bringing home his bride. This was the joy which St. John had all along proposed to himself, and it was now fulfilled. All he had desired was that others should also receive the testimony of Jesus; should believe that He came from heaven, and knew how to lead men there; that He spoke the words of God and was full of His Spirit: That He was in very deed the Son of God, and Lord of all things; whom to receive was life eternal, but to reject eternal ruin.

E. What became of John the Baptist, Mamma, when he left off baptizing, and teaching the people himself? Did he also follow Christ?

M. No, his course upon earth was nearly ended, and the remainder of it was marked by much suffering. His had been no easy life from the beginning, but full, as we have seen, of hardship, self-denial, and toil; nor did the path he had to tread become less rough towards its close. We read, in the Gospel according to St. Luke, that Herod the Tetrarch of Galilee shut John up in prison. This Herod, like the one we read of at the time of our Saviour's birth, appears to have been a wicked man; and John the Baptist, like a faithful servant of God, had boldly found fault with him for his many sins. Amongst his other bad actions, Herod had lately taken away Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, and married her himself, thus breaking most openly one of God's commands; and John, at the risk of his displeasure, dared to tell him of this sin.

In consequence of this interruption in his wickedness, and interference with his actions, Herod shut up John in prison. Then indeed was fulfilled what John had said of himself, that he must decrease, as his heavenly Master increased. Our Lord heard this, and knew also how jealously He Himself was watched by the Pharisees, and how angry they were at the success which His preaching had already met with, He would not, therefore, at this time, remain any longer at Jerusalem, but left Judea altogether, and went into Galilee.

E. I should like to ask you, Mamma, before you go any further, what Herod this was who shut John up in prison, and why he is called the Tetrarch of Galilee? I know it was not the same Herod who put the little innocents to death; for he died before Joseph and Mary came back from Egypt.

M. No, that Herod was called Herod the Great, and was the first Jewish king of that name. He had many descendants, and all of them were called Herod, although they had other names besides this general one. You remember that Joseph and Mary, after their return from Egypt, were afraid to go into Judea, because they heard that Archelaus was reigning in the place of his father. He was called Herod Archelaus; but, although he governed Judea, he was not its king. Herod the Great had indeed left him almost all his dominions; but the Roman Emperor Augustus Cæsar did not approve of this, and would only allow him to be governor of Judea, Idumea, and Samaria. It was not then either Herod the Great, or Herod Archelaus, that shut up John in prison, but a brother of his, called Herod Antipas. He is also

called Herod the Tetrarch, or the Tetrarch of Galilee, because he had a fourth part of the dominions of Herod the Great his father, being chief governor of Peræa and Galilee: the word Tetrarch literally meaning the ruler of a fourth part of a state, province, or kingdom.

Let us now follow our Redeemer's steps again, and accompany Him in His journey into Galilee. You can tell me, I dare say, what part of the country He must pass through on His way thither?

E. Yes, Mamma, He must have passed through Samaria; for that country lies exactly between Judea and Galilee.

M. You are quite right; Judea is on one side to the south, and Galilee on the other, to the north of that part of the Holy Land which was called Samaria; and our Lord could not reach Galilee without passing through it, unless, as you will see on the map, he had gone a long way round, to the eastward of the river Jordan.

E. The people of Samaria were not exactly the same as the Jews, were they, Mamma? I remember how they teased and interrupted the Jews when they were rebuilding the temple; but I do not quite recollect their history.

M. I do not wonder that you have partly forgotten it; as it is a long time now since we last spoke of them. If you wish to know more of them, you must carry your thoughts back to the time of the captivity, when Shalmaneser king of Assyria was permitted to destroy the kingdom of Israel, and to take the city of Samaria, which was the chief city in that kingdom. The tribes of Israel, you know, he carried away into

Assyria, and settled them in different towns. At the same time he brought people from Babylon, and other parts of his own land, and placed them in the cities of Samaria, where they became intermixed with some of the remainder of the Israelites, who had not been taken into captivity. These people were heathens, who did not fear the Lord; "therefore the Lord sent lions among them and slew them." Upon this the people were much alarmed, and the king of Assyria hearing of their state, and supposing that the God of Israel was offended with them, sent down an Israelite priest "to teach them how they should fear the Lord." In this manner they obtained some knowledge of the true God; but they still kept up a good deal of their former idolatry, "fearing the Lord," yet at the same time "serving their graven images, both their children, and their children's children." Such were the people of Samaria, and as such, objects of hatred to the Jews, who would have no kindly intercourse with them. You remember how this feeling had been greatly increased by the ill will which the Samaritans showed towards the Jews on their return from their captivity, and the great hindrance that they caused them in the work which they had so much at heart, the restoring of the Temple.

E. Thank you, Mamma, for this account of the Samaritans; I remember that you 'told me some of this before, though not all, I think; but I do not yet quite understand whether Samaria was a city or a country. I remember an account of that dreadful famine in the city of Samaria, when it was besieged by Benhadad king of Syria in the time of Elisha, and you were saying just now that it was taken by Shal-

maneser, and yet we have been talking now of a country, and of the cities of Samaria.

M. Because Samaria was a province of Palestine, containing other towns also, though it took its name from its chief city, the city of Samaria, which was once the capital of the kingdom of Israel, that is, of the ten tribes. It was built on a pleasant and fruitful hill, about a day's journey from Jerusalem; and the kings of Israel, one after another, did all they could to make it one of the strongest, finest, and richest cities possible. It was here that Ahab built his palace of ivory; and we learn from the prophet Amos, that the place was sunk in luxury and effeminacy. An old Jewish writer tells us, that "it was on a mountain and well fortified; had springs, well-watered land, gardens, paradises, vineyards, and olive yards." Shalmaneser, you know, spent three years in besieging it; and when at last he did take it, he reduced it to a heap of stones. In the course of years it was partly rebuilt; but Herod the Great was the first person who restored it in any degree to its former splendour. It is now only a small and poor village, though many traces may be found of the magnificent buildings which once adorned it.

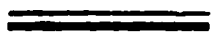
You will now, I think, quite understand that the Samaritans were not Israelites; though we shall see that they worshipped the Lord and had some expectations of the Messiah.

In passing through Samaria our Lord came to the town of Sychar, anciently called Shechem, near to the place where the bones of Joseph were buried. It was a parcel of ground which Jacob had given to his beloved son Joseph, as a token that his descendants,

namely the tribe of Ephraim, should afterwards inherit this part of the country; and this was in fact most wonderfully fulfilled, when Joshua divided the land of Canaan between the different tribes, as you may see by looking at the map. Here Jacob himself had formerly dwelt, and had bought a field, where he had spread his tent: and there was still a spring of water called Jacob's well. It lies in the direct road from Jerusalem, at a little distance from the town of Sychar or Sichem, now called Napolese.

The names of Jacob and Joseph had made this a sacred spot, and long had it been held in high esteem: but the blessed Jesus was about to make it more dear and hallowed than it had ever been before, and to shed a fragrance around its memory which should last to all generations.

See *John* iii. 22—36, iv. 1—6.



THIRTEENTH SUNDAY EVENING.

THE WOMAN OF SAMARIA.

M. We left the history of our blessed Lord last Sunday evening, just as He had approached the well of Jacob; and we read that Jesus being wearied with His journey, sat down to rest beside this well. The way had already been long, and He arrived at this refreshing spot during the hottest season of the day, “the weary hour of noon.”

Now you know that, in taking upon Him our flesh, our blessed Lord had submitted to all the toils and

hardships of poverty ; therefore were all His journeyings performed on foot.

E. Yes, and I know you have often told me that the Lord Jesus took upon Him “our weaknesses” too ; therefore, I suppose, He often felt pain and weariness ?

M. And what wonderful condescension there was in this ! What encouragement and comfort does it contain for all who are called upon to toil and suffer here below. They do not suffer alone : there is One who knows and understands all they feel. One who has Himself drunk out of the same cup ; tasted with His own lips the portion which they have to drink ; borne Himself pain, and sorrow, and weariness ; felt the misery of hunger and thirst ; known, in fact, all that human beings can suffer ; and known it of His own accord, for this very purpose, that, having known all, He might be able to pity all ! That, looking back to His own sufferings, He might feel for those of His poor followers, and might comfort, and help, and support all who look to Him for succour.

But in resting by the side of Jacob’s well during the heat of the day, our blessed Lord was not merely seeking refreshment for His own wearied body. No, He had an object in view, which to Him was of infinitely greater value ; the rest, relief, and refreshment of a poor sinner’s soul. Nay, who shall say whether this was not the Saviour’s one great object, when He drew near that spot, and sat down alone by the side of that well ?—Be this however as it may, we find, as we follow the sacred story, that our Lord had not rested long there, before a woman of Samaria came thither to draw water, and Jesus said unto her, “ Give

me to drink ;” for His disciples were not with Him, but had gone into the city to buy food. There is reason from the story to believe, that this poor woman had been a very sinful person ; and we find from the answer she had made our Lord, that her wicked life had hardened her heart, as wickedness generally does, and dried up those feelings of kindness and compassion, which would otherwise, as a matter of course, have led her to pity and relieve a weary traveller¹. Instead of granting our Lord’s request, this unhappy creature mocked at His distress, and tauntingly replied, “ How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me which am a woman of Samaria ?”

E. Oh, Mamma, how sad that was ! to be sure she could not tell that it was Jesus ; but she ought not, because her country and His were enemies to one another, to have refused a little water to any wearied man.

M. No, my love, she ought not ; and perhaps there were many other women from that same city who would not have thought of refusing so small a kindness to a Jewish traveller : but, as I said before, her wicked life had probably hardened her heart, and made her cold and selfish, and careless of the sufferings of others. Poor wretched creature ! she little thought to whom she addressed those hard, unfeeling words ! But though she knew not the friend and Saviour of sinners, He knew her : yea, had known and followed her through all her sad and guilty life ; and at the very moment when she was mocking at His distress, and refusing to relieve it, He was preparing

¹ Burkitt.

for her blessings great and infinite ; mercies which she could not understand then, but for which she will praise Him through a long and blessed eternity. True, this poor woman was a Samaritan ; but the feelings of the Jews towards her nation had no place in the Saviour's mind : true, she was a lost and sinful creature ; but He came to seek and to save that which was lost. Certainly she had answered Him most unkindly ; but this shall not hinder His love towards her. What was His reply ? “ Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.”

E. How kind, Mamma, when she had refused Him a draught of water to quench His thirst ! I think our Lord Jesus Christ seems to be much more kind than any one I have ever heard of.

E. You are quite right, my dear child ; there is no human love or kindness which can bear any comparison with the love, and compassion, and kindness, of our blessed Saviour. I am glad, that you begin to see this already ; and am sure that the more you know of Him, the more strikingly you will observe the difference between Him and all human beings ; the more clearly you will see that His thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor His ways as our ways, but that “ to the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses” without number, “ though we have rebelled against him.” It was thus, you see, in the case before us. The woman of Samaria would not take the trouble to refresh His weary body ; but He was ready to pity and relieve her perishing soul : “ I would have given

thee living water." So kindly does Christ deal with those that deal unkindly with Him ! forgetting in a moment His fatigue and thirst, and the mid-day heat, He thought only of the spiritual drought of this Samaritan woman. He invites her to ask of Him "living water," which should be an unfailing fountain, springing up within that now withered heart, to refresh and purify it continually. By this He meant, as we are afterwards told, the supplies of His "spirit, which they that believe on him should receive." Yes; if she knew the gift of God, what good things God could give her, and would ask them from Christ, through whom alone such blessings could flow, He would have given her living water,—even the sanctifying gifts and saving graces of His Holy Spirit, which, as water cleanses and refreshes the body, should cleanse and purify her unclean heart, refresh and satisfy her thirsty soul.

But let us observe that she was to ask for this; so precious and inestimable a gift could only be obtained by asking for it. This was the course which this poor woman and every one of us must take, if we would obtain the precious things which Christ has to give.

E. Yes, but, Mamma, she did not know the gift of God, for our Saviour says so?

M. True, my love, it was ignorance that deprived her, and that deprives many besides her, of the great blessings God has in store for us; ignorance of their worth and of our need. It is this that keeps us from seeking Christ, and the graces of His Holy Spirit. We know not the value of them, and feel not our want of them. Did we but know the value of such a Saviour, and our own exceeding need of Him, we

should not be so cold in our desires towards Him, nor so weak in our endeavours to benefit by His mercies.

Did we but know who and what Christ is; did we but see the beauty of His character, the fulness of His grace, to supply all our wants, and the value of His salvation, how thankfully should we hear Him speak of that living water, which should spring up in our hearts.at His bidding, unto eternal life.

E. I long to hear, Mamma, what this poor woman thought of our Saviour's words.

M. Alas! she did not know their meaning: she had no understanding for spiritual things. She thought our Saviour spoke of some earthly fountain, and was rather offended at the idea of His pretending to supply her with purer water than the much-valued well of Jacob could produce. She said to him, "Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; from whence then hast thou living water? Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself with his children and his cattle?"

Pitying this unhappy woman's ignorance, and bearing patiently with her unbelief, the blessed Jesus condescended gently to point out to her the difference between the water she valued so much, and that which He had to give. Listen to His inviting, His refreshing words; "Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water, shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst: but the water that I shall give him, shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." I need hardly explain these beautiful words to you. You will readily understand,

that the well from which she was going to draw, would at best in a few years be dried up, and that its waters even now, could only relieve her thirst for a moment: day after day she must retread her weary steps, and return to draw, until the time would come, when no outward supplies could preserve her drooping body any longer. But the water which Christ offered her, was a far other stream than this. Whoever drank of that water should never thirst again after earthly things; but should feel within him instead such a thirst, such desires as nothing from below could satisfy—the thirst of the *soul*; a thirst after God, which the Spirit of God alone can satisfy:—that Spirit which should be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life. This, my child, was the thirst that David spoke of, when he said, “As the hart desireth the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God! my soul thirsteth for God, for the living God.” O blessed thirst! O blessed desires! happy those who feel them! God will never allow them to remain unsatisfied; but will quench them for ever beside that river which is called, “the river of God,” and “is full of water;” that “river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High.”

E. You said, dear Mamma, that the woman of Samaria began to wish for the water which Christ could give her? Did she believe then that He was the Son of God?

M. No, she did not yet believe, nor even thoroughly understand His words, for she said, “Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw;” evidently thinking still merely of her bodily wants.

Of the wants of her soul she knew nothing: but our blessed Lord did not intend to tantalize her with the mere sound of blessings, which she could not understand nor value, because she did not know her need of them; no, He drew her on by gentle degrees to look into her own heart, that miserable abode of sin; which, though she knew it not, so greatly needed cleansing. Sin had indeed made that heart hard, and dead, and cold; but a few words from Jesus shall revive, and warm, and soften it.

She had led, as I told you, a very wicked life; all of which was known of course to Christ; and to bring her to a sense of her sins, He led her back to the sad scenes of her former days, and pointed out to her some particulars of her private history, so secret, probably, as to have been known to no human beings, but herself. How startled and ashamed must she have been, when she discovered that what she thought hidden from all, should have been so perfectly known to one, who was an utter stranger to herself!

E. I hope she made haste to throw herself at her Saviour's feet, and to beg Him to pardon her, for she must have known, I think, now, who it was that spoke to her?

M. Not fully, as yet; she merely thought this must be some great Prophet, because He had told her so much, that no one less than a prophet could have known; and she began to enquire of Him in what place God ought to be worshipped; for this was a point much in dispute between the Jews and the Samaritans.

E. Why, Mamma, I thought the temple at Jerusalem was then the house of God?

M. To the Jews it was ; and so it ought to have been to the Samaritans, for the Jews were then the people of God. They had the oracles and ordinances of God ; and amongst them was salvation to be found in the way which God had appointed from the first, even in Jesus Christ, who was to be born among them.

But the Samaritans, being unwilling to go up to Jerusalem, had built a temple for themselves on mount Gerizim near Sychar in opposition to God's express command to seek the place where He had put His name, and which He had chosen to Himself for a house of sacrifice. This was the point which the Samaritan woman wished our Lord to decide. She might perhaps have asked this question in order to draw away our Lord's thoughts from her own case, from those sins which He seemed to know so well, and which she was now afraid, and ashamed to think of. Or, she might have asked from a real desire of henceforth seeking God herself sincerely. But, how this was, can be known only to Him who read her thoughts. Let us consider our Lord's reply, which concerns us, as much as it did her.

Anxious to remove from her mind those prejudices of her country, and, though she had long been a wanderer, to bring her at length into His own fold, our blessed Lord assured her, that these differences between the Jew and the Samaritan would soon be done away. He told her that an hour was coming when neither of these rival temples should assemble their worshippers any more, when the worship of God should not be confined any longer to one place, nor yet to one country ; but the true worshippers throughout the world should "worship the Father in spirit,

and in truth." These are the worshippers whom God delights in; whom He seeks for His service. He

" prefers

" Before all temples the upright heart and pure."

We must indeed, even under the religion of the Gospel, have churches for public worship, and ought to make them in appearance some way worthy of their use; still in vain is the most magnificent, nay, we may add, the most crowded church, unless it contain true worshippers, whose spirits are really engaged in the service of God as well as their bodies. For God is a Spirit; and nothing but the service of the soul or spirit can satisfy Him.

And now, under our blessed Lord's patient and gentle instruction, the clouds of ignorance and sin were fast dispersing from this poor woman's mind, and the light of life was bursting in upon her soul. She began now to recollect with joy, what all her people believed as well as the Jews, that the long promised Redeemer would some day come; and she began to wish for His coming, because she said He would be able to teach them all things that they ought to know.

E. Surely, Mamma, she seems quite a different person now from what she was when she first came to the well.

M. She does indeed: we can hardly think that this is the same woman, who, a little while before, had refused our Lord a little water in so unkind a manner. What a change has the patience and tenderness of Jesus wrought upon her? how has her hard heart been softened; and how eager she is now for further instruction in the way of life!

[*Second Series.*]

H

E. I only wish she had known who it was that was speaking to her !

M. This was a further mercy which Christ intended to bestow. He saw now the humility, simplicity, and sincerity of her heart ; and therefore He made Himself known to her more plainly and fully than He had done to any one. No sooner had she declared that she looked for the Messiah, and believed that He was able to tell her all things, than Jesus said unto her, “ I that speak unto thee am he.” What joy must this declaration have given her ! The Guide to all Truth, the Saviour of the world, stood before her, not merely a prophet, but the very Christ ! Welcome words, indeed ! “ I that speak unto thee am he.” No wonder that in her joy she forgot the errand on which she came, and hurried back into the city, to tell her acquaintance the good tidings ; to bring them also to the knowledge of One who had done such great things for her. “ Come, said she, see a man which told me all things that ever I did ; is not this the Christ ? ”

We have dwelt so long already on this interesting narrative, that I must endeavour to notice very briefly the remainder of the chapter in which it is recorded.

Our Lord’s disciples had returned whilst He was still conversing with the woman of Samaria ; but strange as His condescension must have seemed to them, they did not venture to tell Him what they thought. None of them said to Him, “ What seekest thou ? or why talkest thou with her ? ”

E. I hope they had brought our Saviour some food ?

M. They had, and they entreated Him now to partake of it, and refresh Himself thus after His labours of body and mind : but our Lord’s zeal in His heavenly

work, made Him quite unmindful of His bodily wants. Hunger He had felt, we know; for He had sent His disciples into the town to buy food; and thirst, for He had asked water from the woman of Samaria; but in His desire to bring this wanderer back to God, He had forgotten His fatigue, and His thirst, and His hunger too. “My meat,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work:” and He knew that He should by and bye look back upon all His present labours and sufferings with abundant satisfaction; that He should “see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied.” Indeed, as we proceed in this interesting narrative, we find that the Saviour’s mind was already full of the glorious prospect that lay before Him; the vast spiritual harvest, which should be the reward of His labours;—I mean the multitude of recovered souls whom He should bring home to God.

It was our Lord’s custom to gather instruction for His followers from every thing around Him. From Jacob’s well He leads our thoughts to the “living water” of the Spirit: from the provisions offered to Him by His disciples to that blessed hungering and thirsting after righteousness, which is sure of being satisfied. Then pointing to the fields about, growing up but still green, He tells His disciples to lift up their eyes to the spiritual fields in the world about them, and see them no longer green, but ripe already for the harvest. He should soon, He told them, be sending them forth, as His Apostles, to reap what He had sown; to gather in the fruit of His present labours. For many of the Samaritans believed on Him in consequence of what they had heard from the woman, and they came and entreated Him to visit

their city. And when He had spent two days with them, many more believed on account of His own word, and acknowledged Him to be “indeed the Christ the Saviour of the world.” Here then, Edward, was a field already white for the harvest, a field in which the disciples were soon to labour ; as we read in the Acts of the Apostles, that they afterwards did. There, in the eighth chapter, we are told that “ Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them,” and that “ the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which He did,” and that “ there was great joy in that city.” Again in the same chapter we read, that “ when the Apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John, who when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost,” and that when they had laid their hands on them they did receive that inestimable gift, the living water of the Spirit which Christ had promised them. Blessed work, to be thus employed in the Salvation of souls ! Yet though the labour is such as to repay itself, and though most poor and imperfect at the very best is all human service, yet the faithful labourer shall be abundantly rewarded : for he serves a Master who measures the reward not by the service done, but by His own boundless mercy ; giving abundantly above all that we can ask or think.

What a happiness it is to know that the fields whitening for the Lord’s harvest are daily increasing in number and extent ! that the Gospel of our blessed Saviour is spreading daily more and more, not only

in our own country, but in distant lands ! And what a glorious season it will be, when all these numerous fields are ripe ! Here, alas ! below, while time continues, *tares* will not cease to grow up with the *wheat* ; *pretended* worshippers are mingled with the *true* ; real disciples of Christ, and those who are so only in name, are united together ; both professing to believe in “the Saviour of the world.” And this, my dear child, makes it very necessary that we should watch over our own hearts, and take great care not to deceive ourselves ; not to make so awful a mistake as to suppose that we really believe in Christ when we do not. This should lead us to pray most earnestly to God, to make us worshippers of His name, and believers in His dear Son “in spirit and in truth.” Then at the last great harvest, when the tares shall be bound in bundles to be burnt, we shall be gathered in with the wheat ; or in other words, we shall have one lot with the righteous in the kingdom of our Father.

See *John* iv. 6—42.

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY EVENING.

THE NOBLEMAN OF CAPERNAUM.

M. Two days did our blessed Lord remain in Sychar, teaching its inhabitants the great truths of His Gospel ; increasing and strengthening that faith, which had sprung up in their hearts, when they heard the report which the poor woman of Samaria had brought them, of that wonderful person who had told her all things that ever she did. Happy people, to

be thus taught by Christ Himself! There is no teaching, my child, to be compared to His teaching, and most earnestly ought we to seek a share in it. It is a great thing to be taught to know and love Him by our parents, our teachers, or the ministers whom God has set over us; nor can we be too thankful for such instruction, nor too willing to believe the great and good things which they tell us of this blessed Saviour. But we should not be satisfied with the accounts of others, we should try to know Him for ourselves: we should search His own word, and pray to be enlightened by His own Spirit, and carefully observe all the proofs we may find of His goodness towards ourselves; then, with these favoured Samaritans, we should feel thoroughly assured in our hearts, that He is indeed the Christ the Saviour of the world.

From Samaria, our blessed Lord went on to Cana in Galilee; can you tell me what other city lay directly in His path?

E. Yes, He must have gone, I think, through His own city Nazareth, for you see here on the map that that place lies nearly in the road from Sychar in Samaria to Cana in Galilee. I suppose He rested there among His own friends.

M. One would have thought, indeed, that Nazareth would always have been a home to Him, after having spent there so many years of His holy life; and that there would have been many persons there who would have grieved whenever He left them, and have rejoiced whenever He returned again. But it was not so. Jesus was by no means so much valued in His own city, and among His own people, as in

other places ; for men are by nature inclined to prize what is new and difficult to obtain, far more than the blessings, however great, which spring up immediately around their steps. Nor was the blessed Jesus ignorant of this. He who made the heart knows all its folly and its sin ; all its ignorance and unthankfulness. He knew and declared that “a prophet has no honour in his own country ;” and feeling that He was likely to be less kindly received in His early home than elsewhere, He passed by His own city, and visited the smaller towns and villages of Galilee instead. For Galilee was that part of the holy land in which He saw fit to pass the most of His time ; and there He was pleased to work the greater part of His wonderful miracles. I am glad to be able to tell you that these other Galileans received our Lord gladly ; for many of them had been at Jerusalem to keep the Passover, and had seen all the things that He had done there. And Jesus came again to Cana where He had made the water wine. Here no doubt He was well remembered ; this spot had before been hallowed by His gracious presence, and by an extraordinary proof of His Almighty power ; and now it was to be consecrated still further, and to be the favoured scene again of His power, His piety, and His love.

We have already had several opportunities of observing our Saviour’s gracious dealings towards all who needed His compassionate interposition, and in any way applied to Him for help. I dare say you can tell me how many proofs we have had of this already.

E. I think I remember them all, Mamma. You

know how kindly He received the disciples whom John sent to Him, and took them to His own dwelling; then, how bountifully He gave the friends of His mother the wine which they wanted for the wedding feast: and I have not forgotten how patiently He spent the night in teaching Nicodemus, nor how good and gracious and gentle He was to the poor woman of Samaria, who spoke so unkindly to Him at the well.

M. Well answered; and you are now to become acquainted with another part of our Redeemer's character. You have seen that He can take an interest in human happiness, as He did at the wedding feast; that He can bear patiently with great ignorance, as in the case of the ruler Nicodemus; that He is able and willing to bestow on the most guilty the renewing grace of His Holy Spirit; for He gave it to the woman of Samaria. And now you will see that not only human happiness, not only human ignorance and sin, shall obtain the compassion of Christ, but human suffering too. We have seen how He can sympathize with the happy, how He can bear with the ignorant and the guilty, let us now see how He can feel for the miserable.

No sooner had the Lord Jesus arrived at Cana in Galilee, than a case of great distress was brought before Him. There was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum; when he heard that Jesus had left Judea and returned into Galilee, he went to Him and besought Him that He would come down and heal his son; for he was at the point of death.

The person who now stands before our Lord an earnest suppliant for His help, is not, you see, one

of the poor of this world; no, we are expressly told that he is noble; probably an officer of importance in Herod's court; and yet he was as much in need of Christ's assistance, as the poorest and lowest of his fellow creatures could have been. Rank and riches cannot preserve people from trouble. Sickness, sorrow, and death find their way into palaces, as easily as into the meanest cottage; and miserable indeed would be the rich and great and prosperous, if *they* could not go to Jesus as well as others. No doubt this nobleman had already obtained every relief for his child that human help could give him. All that the most skilful physicians, or the tenderest nurses could do, that poor child had doubtless enjoyed; but all had been in vain; he is at the point of death.

What will not a fond parent do, to save his child? This nobleman had heard of Jesus, knew that He was gone into Galilee, and believing firmly that if He were present to see his child, the child might still be saved, he determined to go himself and entreat Jesus to come down to Capernaum. This was an errand too important to trust to any one else: who would travel so quickly, who would beg so earnestly, who would return so impatiently to the dying bed, as the fond parent himself? Painful must it have been to tear himself away from that sick chamber, and to undertake a journey, which must have occupied many hours, at a moment when every breath the child drew might be his last! But faith in Christ overcame the parent's weakness. He felt, no doubt, a strong persuasion that his journey would not be in vain; that the time he seemed to lose in travelling those thirty miles would be abundantly

made up to him, and he therefore, without hesitation, departed from Capernaum.

Such was the history of the nobleman who stood before our blessed Lord on His arrival at Cana. His faith had been sufficient to bring him to the feet of Jesus—it enabled him even to bear the gentle reproof with which our Lord replied to his first earnest entreaty that He would heal his child ; “ Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.” His only reply to this was, “ Lord, come down ere my child die ;” and yet, in that very answer, we see how weak and imperfect his faith was. Observe his words : “ Come down, ere my child die.”

E. Ah ! I see. “ Come down ;” as if Christ could not have cured him at a distance, as easily as by the side of his sick bed.

M. Yes ; and “ ere my child die,” as if the same power, which could heal him at the point of death, could not raise him up again though he were really dead.

E. Perhaps, Mamma, he only looked upon Christ as a great prophet, and did not quite believe that He was God Himself, and that a word from Him could raise the dead.

M. This, I have no doubt, was exactly the case ; the impatience of the father too seems to have led him to some degree of disrespect to our blessed Lord ; since he not only asked Him to heal his son, but seemed to expect that this Great Physician should leave every thing else immediately, and follow him ; as if the sorrow with which he was overwhelmed, was of more consequence than every thing else beside. Poor man ! it was well for him that he addressed

himself to One, who is ready to make a gracious allowance for the infirmities of His weak and sinful creatures, who does not measure His mercies by the worthiness of those who apply for them, but by His own infinite compassion, and their exceeding need ! Let us attend to the Saviour's reply—it was full of dignity and compassion. “Go thy way, thy son liveth.” How calm, how kind ! Not a word of reproof ; although his faith had been so imperfect, so mixed with unbelief, and even with presumption. Not a moment did He lose in relieving his distress ; not a moment did He keep him in suspense. No ; the blessed Jesus knows how “a father pitieth his children,” and He felt for this father's sufferings, made allowance for his impatience, and immediately spoke the blessed words which were to heal his child ; showing to him at the same time that it was not his place to teach Christ how to work ; but rather to receive His mercies humbly and thankfully in the way that He saw fit to bestow them. Yea, and He would convince him too, that time, and place, and distance are nothing to Him ; that sickness and health, life and death hang upon His lips, and that His commands have lost none of their power since that day when “he made the worlds with a word ; when he spake and they were done, he commanded and they stood fast.” He is equally able to say now, “Go thy way, thy son liveth.”

E. I am so glad that He had not come all that way in vain ! How happily he must have returned home !

M. Yes ; for he had obtained even more than he had sought. “Christ had not only cured the child

of his fever, but the father of his unbelief;" the nobleman no longer thought it necessary that Jesus should "come down" to perform the cure: he believed at once the word that Jesus had spoken, and went his way. Nor was his faith in vain! No disappointment shall ever attend those who believe in Christ. None shall ever have cause to regret that they trusted in Him. No! they shall only have cause to grieve, that they did not trust Him more; that their faith was so imperfect; so mixed with sin and unbelief: for never will He fail or deceive those who hope in Him. It shall be with all such, as it was with this nobleman in the Gospel; they shall find that the Lord Jesus has done for them far more than they venture to expect.

Long before the anxious parent had been able to reach his home, his servants came out to meet him, to tell him at once the delightful news, "Thy son liveth." What was the father's reply? Did he rush at once to the child's embrace, and in the happiness of seeing him restored to health, forget the means by which it had been done? No; he stopped to enquire particularly at what hour his son had begun to amend; to examine carefully at what time the fever had left him; and when he found that it was at the same hour, when Jesus had said unto him, "Thy son liveth," he acknowledged at once the power of that wonderful word, and became in good earnest a disciple of Jesus; "himself believed and his whole house." Thus the sickness of his child, which had caused him so much grief and suffering, turned out the greatest blessing which he had ever known. The fever, which threatened to deprive him of what he loved best on earth,

had sent him to Christ; had brought him to the knowledge of One, who could not only cure the body but the soul too! That severe sickness, and that anxious journey, would from this moment be treasured up in his memory as the happiest events of his life! If he had not known sorrow, he would most likely never have known the Lord Jesus Christ!

Histories such as these should, and by divine grace they may, make lasting impressions on our hearts. We too must expect our seasons of sorrow and sickness. We shall not be always well, nor always happy: we too may see those we loved stretched upon a dying bed. What a blessing will it be to us, then, if we know where to seek at once for help, and have not in the midst of our distress to go a long way to look for the Lord Jesus Christ; but can hope, and believe, and feel that He is already with us; that no trouble can happen to us without His permission; that all is intended for our good; that He has no need to "come down" from His bright throne in the heavens to help us; but that a word, that a look will do. Happy thought, to reflect that He will not allow us to suffer one moment more than is for our real good, and that, if we are supported and comforted by Him, the time will surely come when we shall look back with thankfulness upon all that He has done, and find our faith increased and strengthened by all that we have gone through.

E. You said, I think, Mamma, that Capernaum was about thirty miles from Cana?

M. I did; so that, in the miracle we have now been considering, we have a proof, not only of our Lord's kindness and power, but of His spiritual presence

every where. He can heal, as we observed before, at a distance as well as near: He is a Saviour “afar off,” no less than “at hand.” Though now in bodily presence removed from us as far as the highest heavens, where He sits on the right hand of the Majesty on high, He is still, by means of His divine presence, near us continually, and ready as well as able to save us to the uttermost.

See *John* iv. 43—54.

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY EVENING.

CHRIST PREACHING IN GALILEE.

M. Soon after the performance of the great and gracious miracle mentioned in our last conversation, our blessed Lord appears to have visited His own city, Nazareth. But how different was His reception there, to what it had been in the other parts of Galilee! Most completely did it prove the truth of His own words, which we noticed before, “A prophet hath no honour in his own country.” He did not visit Nazareth, until there had “gone out a fame of him through all the region round about;” that is, till all the country round was engaged in talking of Him, dwelling with wonder on the wisdom with which He had taught in the synagogues of Galilee, and on the miracles which He had wrought: as, for instance, the extraordinary one at Capernaum, and, no doubt, many others which are not mentioned in the Bible. For, as St. John tells us at the end of

his narrative, we have only a part of our Saviour's works related in the Gospel. Were they all recorded "the whole world," he says, "would not contain the books that should be written." So incessantly was our Lord employed in doing good. But though there was so much to lead the Nazarenes to believe in Christ, they received Him with marked unbelief. "They wondered," indeed, "at his gracious words," and well they might, you will think, when I tell you how He first addressed them. He went into their synagogue or place of public worship on the Sabbath day, as He was always in the habit of doing, and there He was asked to read a portion of Scripture. Reading the Scriptures was a part of the regular service of the synagogue; and it was the custom of the Jews, when any distinguished teacher went to the synagogue, to ask him to read a portion of Scripture and explain it. And there was delivered unto Jesus the book of the prophet Esaias; for each part or book of Scripture was, in those days, written on separate rolls or pieces of parchment. And "when he had opened" or unrolled the book, he found the place where that beautiful passage is written, which gives so faithful a picture of our Lord's own office and character. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind; to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." These words, so full of grace and love, of pardon and peace, the blessed Jesus read, and these only; and when, on

closing the book, He perceived that the eyes of the whole congregation were earnestly fixed upon Him; He took the opportunity of telling them most plainly, that He was Himself the very person of whom the prophet had said such excellent things so many years before; and that every word of that prophecy was now fulfilled before them. Could Christ have made Himself known to them in a more inviting and encouraging manner? But instead of allowing their hearts to be drawn towards Him, they said among themselves, "Is not this Joseph's son?" and allowed the lowliness of His outward condition to prejudice their minds against Him. We are told, indeed, that they wondered at His gracious words; but wonder is not faith. Their proud hearts revolted at the thoughts of receiving, as their Saviour, one whom they had known from His earliest days, and seen growing up as a poor child in an obscure family, like a weak or tender plant, as the prophet says, from a dry stem. To their worldly ideas there was nothing attractive in Him, that they should desire Him for their Lord, notwithstanding all His miracles; so they despised and rejected Him. Our blessed Lord, indeed, warned them, that, if they thus shut their hearts against His gracious words, they might provoke Him to leave them altogether, and bestow His precious Gospel on the heathen, rather than on such an unbelieving people, though fellow-citizens with Him upon earth. But this only filled them with wrath; so that they thrust Him violently out of their city, and had He not made His escape, would have cast Him headlong from the brow of the hill on which

their city was built ! Alas ! how little does it avail to be near to Christ in other respects, if our hearts are far from Him !

What a grievous fact, and at the same time what a solemn warning, that those who should have been the most ready to receive Christ, should be the first to reject Him !

“ 'Tis sad—but yet 'tis well be sure
We on the sight should muse awhile,
Nor deem our shelter all secure
Even in the Church's holiest aisle.”

We wonder at the conduct of the Nazarenes ; but let us be careful that in spirit we never imitate it. We have in this country many and great privileges ; we are members of a Christian, a Protestant, and a truly apostolical Church. May we be, indeed, the better and not the worse for it ! It would be far happier for us “ never to have known the way of righteousness, than, when we have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto us.”

Rejected by the Nazarenes, our Lord left them and returned to Capernaum, in which place He from this time took up His chief abode ; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet saying, “ The land of Zabulon and the land of Nephthalim by the way of the sea beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles ; the people which sat in darkness saw great light, and to them which sat in the region of the shadow of death light is sprung up.”

You will understand this prophecy and the fulfilment of it better, when I tell you that that part of Palestine where Capernaum was situated, and which

was now called Galilee of the Gentiles, because it was inhabited by many Gentiles, as well as Jews, had formerly been occupied by the tribes of Zabulon and Nephthalim, and was on the western side of the river Jordan. Capernaum itself stood on the sea coast, that is on the coast of the sea of Galilee.

Far removed, you see, was this part of the Holy Land from the temple at Jerusalem, and from various causes thickly wrapped in ignorance and error, as with the gloom of night, or, as the prophet said, with a shadow dark as death. But the light of life was about to spring up among the inhabitants of Galilee; for from that time Jesus began regularly to preach there the Gospel, and to call upon them to “repent, because the kingdom of heaven was at hand.”

In this place our Lord also added to the number of the disciples, who were in constant attendance upon Him, by calling to this office Simon Peter and Andrew his brother, with James and John the sons of Zebedee. These four were poor fishermen on the sea of Galilee; and when Jesus bade them “come after him,” He said to them “follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” For the Gospel is compared in scripture to a great net, which the apostles were to cast into the troubled waters of human life; and which is continually bringing on the shores of eternity the souls of human beings, men, women, and children, some good and some bad. Here indeed they are often mistaken, the one for the other; but the angels will in the other world most carefully separate them.

Our Lord took his new disciples with Him to Capernaum; for He had called them to Himself

when He was walking by the sea of Galilee, where they were busily engaged in fishing, and they had immediately left their nets and followed Him. In Capernaum He entered into the synagogue, and on the Sabbath-day taught the assembled people, accompanying His preaching with miracles. It was the custom of our Lord to reverence the Sabbath, and to join with His countrymen in the observance of public worship; not indeed in the superstitious manner which the Pharisees taught; but joining to prayer and teaching deeds of mercy, which those proud Jews in their folly condemned, saying that such works of love were not lawful on the day of sacred rest. And what our Lord did Himself, He has mercifully provided for the continuance of in His Church. The sabbath, thanks to God, is still observed, at least in this our favoured land; and the gospel of Christ still preached for the comfort of all who feel their need of it. And though the cure of bodily disease by miracles has ceased, the power of the Holy Spirit continues to attend the preaching of the Gospel in the public congregation on the sabbath day: so that many a sick soul is continually cured, and many a broken heart comforted, and many are delivered from the power of Satan, that impure spirit who still works in the children of disobedience.

E. Does the Bible tell us, Mamma, what the miracles were, which Jesus worked in the synagogue?

M. On this occasion He cast out an unclean spirit with which an unhappy man was possessed. For at that time a power was permitted to the evil spirits, of tormenting the bodies of men, and afflicting them in various ways out of the common course of nature.

E. But they do not do so now, Mamma?

M. No; of this power they have been deprived; but they are still allowed to tempt mankind to evil; and to lead astray those, who willingly yield themselves to their temptations. For against our will they can have no power over us. If we “resist the Devil, he will flee from us:” and if we pray for the Holy Spirit, God will give us His help; which is far more powerful to do us good, than that of any evil spirit to hurt us. Only let us draw nigh to God with true repentance and fervent prayer, in the observance of His sabbaths, and the hearing of the gospel of His kingdom; then will He draw nigh to us, and deliver us from all evil.

You can easily imagine how astonished the people were at our Lord’s power over the unclean spirits, and His fame increased in every place round about. He however went on as if nothing had been done, “forgetting,” as St. Paul says, “the things which were behind” and finished, and “looking on to those which were before” still unaccomplished. No sooner had He left the synagogue, than He found a fresh opportunity of doing good. This was in the dwelling of His new disciple Simon, whose wife’s mother had been taken with a great fever. And they besought Christ for her; and He stood over her and rebuked the fever, and healed her at once with His word, so that she was able to rise immediately from her sick bed, and to shew her gratitude by using her restored strength in the service of our Lord, in waiting upon Him and attending to His comfort. “She arose and ministered unto them.”

Nor did the close of day bring any rest to Christ,

nor any end to His labours ; for when the sun was setting, and the sabbath was over, all they that had any sick brought them unto Him.

E. Was Sunday over then, Mamma, as soon as the sun had set? I thought the whole day, until it is time to go to rest, was to be kept holy unto God?

M. So it is with us Christians, but the Jews began their sabbath on six o'clock on Friday evening, and ended it at six on Saturday evening. As soon therefore as the sun had begun to set, multitudes of people began to gather round our Lord, bringing with them, great numbers of sick persons, and such as were possessed with evil spirits. Nor did they come in vain. The sick He healed, graciously condescending, though with much more fatigue to Himself, to lay His hands on every one of them, whilst the devils He rebuked and cast out. Wherever He went, and at all times, mercy and power attended Him ; in the private house, as well as in the public congregation ; in the morning season of leisure, as well as during the busier hour of noon. So entirely, indeed, was His heart set upon the great work, which He had come into the world to do, that He would hardly allow Himself the necessary refreshment of sleep which nature required ; but " in the morning," after this day of so many miracles, " rising up a great while before day, He went out and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed." His works of love gave way only to the work of prayer and praise. The glory of God and the good of man occupied all His thoughts, filled up all His time. Happiest my child are those, who can follow the nearest (though at how vast a distance !) in the steps of His holy example ! true it is, that our Lord's

work was of a peculiar nature, and far higher than ours. But “the *mind*, that was in Christ Jesus,” is expressly proposed in Scripture for the imitation of all Christians. Devout communion by prayer with our heavenly Father, a love of man, and a readiness to shew our love not by words only, but by deeds of kindness and compassion, are strongly pressed upon us in the Gospel of our Lord, and brightly set before us in His most holy life.

So much was now the fame of Jesus spread about in all directions, that even in the desert place, to which He had retired to pray, He was not free from interruption. His disciples followed Him there, and told Him that all men were looking for Him. Had Christ been ambitious, that is, had He valued the admiration and applause of men, what an opportunity was there here of publicly enjoying them! But He despised that worldly applause and favour, by which so many are deceived! He knew what a poor and empty thing is human glory; His holy eye could pierce through all its outward glare, and see vanity written on it all: therefore He shunned it entirely, though without in any degree becoming less earnest and ardent in that course of wisdom and goodness, which had gained Him all this admiration. He did not leave off doing good, but He departed for a time from Capernaum, the place where He had attracted so much notice, and went to preach the blessed truths of His Gospel, and to perform His wonderful acts of mercy, in other cities also of that part of Palestine. But by this time His fame had spread throughout all Syria, so that great multitudes of people followed Him, not only from Galilee, but even from Decapolis,

which is to the east of the sea of Gennesareth, and from Jerusalem in the south, as well as from the whole of Judea, and from the country beyond Jordan.

Consider, Edward, for a moment this extraordinary result of our Lord's teaching and works. Imagine yourself, if you can, arriving as a stranger in Galilee at the time that all this was going on, and suddenly coming upon the great crowds that were flocking to our Lord from all directions. Fancy that you see people of all ranks and all characters following Him, with intense anxiety, to see His works, and to hear His words. "What," you would ask, "can have drawn these crowds together? and who is this remarkable person on whom every eye is fixed? What is His origin?" "That of a carpenter's son," would be the reply. "Whence does He come?" "From the despised town of Nazareth." "Is He rich then, or great?" You might further inquire. "No: He is poor and lowly, often without a place where to lay His head; and all His friends and relations are of the humblest class: moreover He shuns public favour, and despises human praise; carefully avoiding the steps which others take to make themselves rich and great. But have you not heard of His exemplary holiness; His unwearied zeal in doing good; of the divine power which plainly marks His acts of mercy; that the number of those works is only exceeded by the love which shines forth in them; and the love unequalled, excepting by the might displayed in the performance of them? Then as to His teaching, surely 'never man spake as this man!' with so much wisdom, with words of such grace or such authority! All men wonder in astonishment at His

doctrine." Now supposing such an account as this was given you of our Lord's character and proceedings, you would no longer be surprised at the crowds which followed Jesus of Nazareth; you would marvel rather that any should keep away, and that those who followed Him did not all immediately become His devoted disciples, throwing themselves at His feet, and saying, "Lord, we believe, help thou our unbelief." But such, alas! was far from being the case: part only of the crowd were disciples of Jesus; many followed, it is to be feared, from mere curiosity, or perhaps for the cure of bodily disease; and some possibly from a worse motive still, to find out some fault in His speech or conduct, for which they might accuse Him. May it never be thus with us! May we never, as we study His Gospel, either trace His steps, or listen to His teaching in vain. But may His blessed Spirit be with us to draw our hearts to Christ, and to fill us not only with interest or wonder, but with *love*!

See *Luke* iv. 14—44. *Matt.* iv. 12—25. viii. 14—17.
Mark i. 14—39.

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY EVENING.

THE MOUNT OF BEATITUDES.

M. On seeing the multitudes that were again collected around Him, our blessed Lord took the opportunity of instructing those among them who were willing to be His disciples, and explaining to them what was meant by being a follower of Him; for this pur-

pose He went up into a mountain or eminence which stood near Capernaum to the north of the sea of Galilee. On this spot He might be more easily heard by those who really desired instruction, and at the same time less disturbed by the mere crowd. Hither His disciples followed Him; and here our Divine Teacher delivered a discourse which has in consequence been called "the Sermon on the Mount." It contains an account of the blessings which Christ bestows upon His true followers, and describes the character which He expects in them. We will read a part of the beautiful chapters which contain this Sermon at once, and the rest at our leisure in the Bible itself. (See *St. Matt.* v. 1—13.)

What a company is here of Christian graces! What a train of heavenly blessings! May all these lovely tempers be produced in our hearts by that Spirit, whose fruit is "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance!" And may He who can alone procure for us the gift of this Spirit, bestow the blessings which He has Himself pronounced on such dispositions of mind! Let us often ask ourselves, who they are whom the Saviour has pronounced to be "blessed:" we shall find them very different from those whom the world would call happy. The world congratulates, we know, the rich, the great, the gay, and often the proud, the vain, the ambitious, the cruel; only calling their sins by gentler but false names, which sound less harshly upon our ears. But what does the Saviour say? He who cannot be mistaken in His judgment; for we know that those whom He blesses are blessed. Let us listen then to His words: they breathe true

[*Second Series.*]

peace and happiness. “Blessed are the poor in spirit: blessed are they that mourn: blessed are the meek: blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: blessed are the merciful: blessed are the pure in heart: blessed are the peacemakers: blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake.” Such are the characters whom Christ approves. Such are the persons on whom He bestows His blessing! And Oh! how richly are such to be blessed!

The *poor and contrite in spirit*, those who are sensible of their own sin and misery, the truly humble and lowly;—to them is promised the kingdom of heaven.

Those *who mourn now*; those who feel deep sorrow for the sin of their own hearts as well as for the great mass of wickedness which they see all around them, those too who suffer with Christian patience the mournful trials of life—“they shall be comforted” by God’s Spirit even here and enjoy everlasting comfort hereafter; when all tears shall be wiped from their eyes.

The meek, those who submit gently to God’s will, and bear patiently the unkindness of men; these shall be no losers in real happiness: God shall make up to them for all even on earth, and how much more in heaven!

Those who hunger and thirst after righteousness; who know its value and feel their own want of it; who are as eager in their endeavours after it, as the hungry and thirsty to obtain meat and drink;—these persons carry with them their Saviour’s blessing, and have His own gracious promise to assure them that what they thus so earnestly desire they shall obtain.

Yea they shall make great progress in holiness now ; and by and bye they shall be made completely holy for ever, and never again know the grief which now so often distresses them because they cannot love God more and serve Him better. Jesus has said, “ Blessed are they who so hunger and thirst, for they shall be filled.”

The merciful—he who feels for the miseries of others both in soul and body, and is ever ready to pity and comfort, to relieve and help, them as well as to forgive the wrongs which he has received ;—what mercy shall he obtain ! mercy at that time when he will want it most.

Then *the pure in heart*—those who knowing God to be a holy God, who cannot look upon sin, hate and abhor it too ; and make clean their hearts and lives, desiring continually to be washed afresh in that blood which can alone cleanse from sin, and to be sanctified by that Spirit, who can alone make us holy and pure ; what a blessing shall be theirs ! they shall see and enjoy God ! see Him by faith in this life, behold Him in glory in the world to come.

The peacemakers too ! those who love peace and do all they can to live in it themselves, and to promote it among others, they are not overlooked by Christ ; He has bestowed upon them a great and honourable name which shall be a distinction to them far beyond all earthly titles ; He has called them “ the children of God.”

Last upon our Saviour’s list come those who have suffered or shall suffer for His name sake ! Not that He thinks least of these : oh ! no : they are very dear and precious in His sight ! Not one of them shall be

forgotten by Him, from the youngest of those little Innocents who died instead of Him, to the noblest of that glorious Martyr train, who have laid down their lives in His cause from the days of the Apostles to the end of time. Do you remember any such sufferers in our own country, Edward?

E. I was thinking, whilst you spoke, of Lord Cobham, and Wicliff, Latimer, and Luther, and Cranmer, and all those holy men who suffered so much for Christ's sake at the time of the Reformation.

M. You might well think of them, my child; no doubt they were supported under their trials by these very words of our blessed Redeemer—words well fitted to give them courage and peace, even in the agonies of a cruel death, and which they have long since found, by their own blissful experience, to be no less true than consolatory: “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven! Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets that were before you.”

Most interesting and important is it to have so complete a specimen of our Lord's own teaching. He is the Great Prophet and Teacher of His Church, and He was now going about expressly preaching the Gospel, that is to say, “the good tidings” of the kingdom of God. The few verses we have been considering, are called the beatitudes or blessings, and are in fact so many gracious promises to those who are possessed of the graces and virtues of the Christian character. There is one thing which, in

reading these verses, must strike us forcibly, which is, that the kind of persons, thus distinguished by the blessing of Christ, are, in many respects, far different from those who would be admired, and thought happy by the world. I observed this to you before, but it cannot be too strongly impressed upon your mind. In the world you will by and bye find that pride and a high conceit of ourselves is often extolled, and indeed expressly taught, as a kind of what is called magnanimity, or greatness of mind. We shall find the house of mourning shunned, and meekness despised, and righteousness laughed at, and mercy outraged, and purity ridiculed, and peace-making repaid with insult. Yet *remember*, that these, and such as these, are the qualities on which the blessing of Christ descended as the dew of Hermon, and on these, whoever teaches otherwise, a blessing *shall* dwell. To know how to be happy we must not go to the world, but to the mountain of beatitudes, “for there hath the Lord commanded his blessing and life for evermore.” The hedge which Christ has thrown up between His disciples on the mount and the world below, is not one of mere names or words, but of holy tempers and dispositions. Who would not wish to be found among the happy number whom Christ here mentions? Who would not desire to be of a poor and suppliant spirit; sensible of his spiritual wants, and ready for righteousness’ sake to suffer any persecutions, if to such are promised not only comfort, but the kingdom of God? What an encouragement to cultivate a patient temper and a penitent heart! What a reason for being ready to *suffer* the greatest, rather than do the least wrong! Who would not de-

sire to be meek, when Christ has promised to such far greater happiness, than pride and quarrelling could ever bring them? Who would not hunger and thirst after righteousness, whatever pain it may cost them at the time, if they are sure that, however difficult it may be to grow in grace, they shall be abundantly satisfied? far more indeed than if their corn, and wine, and oil increased. And who is there that would not count the pure in heart and the peacemaker among the happiest of human beings, when they remember that they are to see God, and to be called his children?

But we must take an opportunity of reading carefully this first and best of evangelical sermons, and of dwelling particularly on its different parts at greater length than our evening conversation would allow; that from our Lord's own words, so plain and clear that they can scarcely be mistaken, we may learn and remember what it is that He promises *to*, and expects *from*, those who desire to be indeed His disciples, and leaving the world behind them, to ascend with Him to the enjoyment of heavenly blessings. Other parts of Scripture are indeed equally true, and all are precious; for all were written under the guidance of the Spirit of Christ: but few are so plain. The Gospels are a complete history of our Saviour's life, and works, and teaching, and are therefore the first foundation of a Christian's faith; "for other foundation can no man lay," no, not even apostles and prophets, "save that which was already laid, which was Jesus Christ." This it is which makes our Lord's *own* words of such vast importance—those words which contain all the great truths of the Gospel. This it is which makes it so absolutely necessary to attend both to His blessings

•

and to His commands ; for no where else shall we find the blessing, we may rest assured, but where He hath commanded it. True it is that, *without* Him, we can do nothing, and therefore as poor needy creatures, dependent on His compassion, we must go to Him, to be made spiritually rich ; but if, with Him, we still continue to do nothing, then it were better not to have been His disciples. The fruitless branch in Christ, as you have read in one of His own parables, will be first cast off to wither, and then be burned. At the end too of this very discourse our Saviour has dwelt upon this point in the most solemn manner. There He declares in awful words to His disciples ; “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that *doeth the will* of my Father which is in Heaven.”

I always think these are very fearful words, they seem to say so plainly that many deceive themselves on this important subject, and fancy they belong to Christ, when they really do not. For it is not speaking of Him, or even liking to hear about Him, but the sincere endeavour to do His holy will, which is pleasing in His sight, and proves that we are really His disciples. Our Lord knew well how deceitful the heart of man was, and what easy but dangerous mistakes we might make ; therefore He repeated the solemn warning, and, before He dismissed His followers, set before them, in a little parable or story, two kinds of disciples, two sorts of hearers, one who hears the sayings of Christ and doeth them, another who also hears but doeth them not. The one who heard His sayings and did them, might be compared, He said, to a wise man who built his house upon a rock ; and the rain descended, and the floods

came, and the winds blew, and beat upon the house ; and it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock. The one who heard the words of Christ and did them not, He compared to a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand ; and when the same storms came upon his house, it fell, and great was the fall of it. Let us examine this parable for a moment before we part. What is the house that Christ here speaks of? Surely that house which every one of us has to build, even our hope of heaven and eternal life. Our chief business here on earth is to build this house, and to build it so that it shall be able to stand all the storms of trial and trouble which it shall meet with here, and endure for ever. Now how shall this be done? there is only one way of building so as to be quite sure that our house will last for ever. We must build upon the rock ; and that rock is Christ. "Every thing besides Christ is sand." We must lay the foundations of our hope deep and firm in Him, by hearing and doing His sayings, by taking Him for our Prince and Saviour, and making it the constant care of our lives to please Him in all things. We must depend entirely upon Him for procuring help for us from God in all our duties, and for obtaining favour for us with Him ; and we must love and value Christ far above every thing else on earth, feeling, that if we do not belong to Him we are miserable, but that in Him and with Him we are safe for ever. I wonder whether you understand my meaning?

E. Yes, Mamma, I think I do ; but must such great storms beat upon us as Christ speaks of?

M. The rains, the wind, and the flood, must more or less beat upon all of us, my dear child ; for they

are the sorrows, sufferings, and trials to which we are exposed in this world. But even if we could avoid these, there is a storm coming that none can escape. Death and Judgment we must all meet, and against these storms none shall be able to stand, but those whose hopes are built upon Christ Jesus. He is the rock of ages, that has stood and shall stand for ever. Oh ! what will then become of the foolish man who has built his house upon the sand ? Who has heard the words of Christ, but has not kept them ; who has trusted to himself for happiness and safety, and forgotten to provide a safe shelter against the storm. He shall then “lean upon his house, but it shall not stand ;” (Job viii. 14, 15.) it shall fall, just at the time when he most needs it to cover him, and when it is too late to build another. And how bitter will then be the disappointment, how great the shame and loss ! But such is the religion of all mere hearers, who do not the sayings of our Lord. Theirs is an ill-built house on a deceitful foundation, which the first storm will lay even with the ground. Both the houses may appear at first alike, whilst the sun shines and the weather is fair ; none, perhaps, may be able to see any reason why the one on the sand should not stand as long as the other upon the rock. The rain, the wind, and the storm, will show the difference. Never then let us forget, my child, that the religion of Christ is not a thing merely to talk about, but that it is a *principle* of holiness in the heart and life. To feel our own helplessness ; to mourn for our sins ; to be patient under our sorrows ; to be meek when provoked ; to thirst after righteousness ; to love mercy ; to cultivate purity ; to promote peace ; to suffer wil-

lingly for righteousness' sake ; to let our light, that is to say our holy lives, shine before men ; to keep the law of God, not merely in the outward letter, but in newness of spirit ; to seek our reward from God ; to forgive our enemies ; to set our affections on treasures in heaven ; to look to our own faults and not to those of others ; to seek good from God for ourselves, and to be ready on our part to do good to all around us ; these are the true marks of a Christian. These are the duties our Lord urged upon us, the fruits which His preaching was intended to produce, the dispositions of heart by which we must show that we belong to Christ. When, by the help of His blessed Spirit, we cultivate such tempers and habits, then are we His disciples indeed ; then do we rise far above the worldly crowd, and dwell on the mount with Christ, within the reach of His blessings.

See *Matt.* v. vi. vii.

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY EVENING.

MIRACULOUS DRAUGHT OF FISHES.

M. We are now, my dear Edward, to leave the mountain where we spent our time, I trust, so profitably last Sunday evening, and follow our Divine Lord to the lake of Gennesareth, a place which He was wont to hallow by His presence, and to make the favoured scene of His Almighty power and goodness. Sometimes we find Him walking on its borders, conversing with His disciples or teaching the people, and often

crossing its waves ; this He did partly, perhaps, for His convenience in moving from place to place, and partly it may have been to comfort those whose lives are spent upon the sea, and to encourage them in all their dangers and distresses to pray to Him as their Saviour, who having known by His own experience all the hardships and difficulties to which they are exposed, is able, they may be very sure, to pity them, and not less willing to help and to save.

E. Mamma, I think you told me once, that very beautiful flowers grow on the edge of this lake ?

M. Yes, we are informed by travellers that the western banks of it are clothed with large and beautiful rhododendrons, growing down close to the water's edge ; and a very sweet Poet has told us, that

“ All thro' the summer night,
Their blossoms red and bright,
Spread their soft breasts unheeding to the breeze,
Like hermits watching still
Around the sacred hill,
Where erst our Saviour watched upon His knees.”

Full, as it is, of dear and sacred recollections, and surrounded with natural beauties, this lake must, indeed, be a most lovely and interesting place. In grandeur of appearance, it is said to be almost equal to that beautiful lake of Geneva, of which you have heard so much ; its waters are deep and still, surrounded almost entirely with lofty hills ; and though it is subject to occasional storms, they never disturb it for any great length of time. I am glad you mentioned the flowers, for it is interesting to you to know something of a spot where much of our Lord's time was

spent, and where we are now to accompany Him, that we may find fresh reason to wonder and adore.

You heard last Sunday how long a time He spent in instructing His disciples; but now that He was come down from the mountain, the multitudes continued to follow Him with as much interest as ever; and as He approached the lake, they continued to press upon Him to hear the word of God. Now there were too ships standing by the lake; but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets. And our Lord entered into one of these ships, which belonged to His own disciple Simon, and begging him to push out a little way into the water to escape from the crowd, He sat down and taught the people out of the ship. And when He had finished speaking, He told Simon to launch out farther into the lake, and to let down his nets for a draught of fishes. All night had Simon and his companions been toiling without catching any fish, and so he told our Lord; adding, however, with cheerful obedience, “Nevertheless, at *thy* word, I will let down the net.” Hitherto, our Lord’s miracles had been chiefly confined to the curing of diseases; but they were enough to give a humble and ingenuous mind a deep reverence for His word, and a ready compliance with His will. At the same time it does not appear that either Peter, or his companions James and John, who were in another boat close at hand, had any expectation of what followed. For when the net, which he had let down at the command of Jesus, inclosed such a multitude of fishes, that it broke with their weight, and even the boats were beginning to sink with the

load, they were astonished and filled with awe. They wondered, probably, to see that the dominion of Jesus was in the seas as well as on the dry land; that it reached even to the mute creatures in the secret depths of the waters, as well as to the bodies of men; and that under His feet were put all things here below, even "the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the sea." Peter, above all the rest, was so astonished, that he fell down at Jesus' feet, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." He felt, no doubt, that he was in the presence of a very great and a very holy being: and immediately his own exceeding sinfulness rushed to his mind, and made him sensible how utterly unworthy he was of Christ's presence in his boat, and that he had more need really to be alarmed than comforted at feeling himself so near to Him.

E. I do not wonder, Mamma, that Peter felt afraid; but I am sorry that he asked Christ to depart from him, because you know nobody else could help him or forgive him his sins.

M. Exactly so, my child; that sinfulness, of which he complained so bitterly, was the very thing that made Christ's presence so needful to him, and should have led him rather to say, "Abide with me, for without thee I shall be ever wretched and for ever lost, O Lord." At the same time we cannot but see, that Peter's was a holy fear, of that very kind which led Moses to say, "I exceedingly fear and quake;" and Isaiah to cry out, "Woe is me, for I am undone; for I am a man of unclean lips: mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts;" and even Daniel, that "man greatly beloved," to fall with his face upon the

ground, because he could not bear the sound of that voice, and the sight of that countenance ! Happy those, however, whom even terror brings to a sense of their sins ; and happier still if we are thereby led to confess our sins to Him who came into the world for the express purpose of saving us from them. For as a conviction of our own unworthiness must naturally follow a sense of the divine perfections, so it is exactly the feeling which should lead us nearer to our gracious and compassionate Redeemer, instead of driving us from Him. Whether we feel it or not, of this we may be very sure, that what Peter said of himself is true of all men ; we too are sinful creatures, and, it may be, much more so than Peter was ; but a humble confession of our guilt is not likely to send our Lord away from us : on the contrary it will be sure to draw down upon us His pity and His help. To Peter, oppressed with a sense of sin, our Saviour's answer was such as to drive away all alarm from his mind : " Fear not ; from henceforth thou shalt catch men."

E. That is like what our Lord said before, when Peter and Andrew, and James and John, were first told to follow Him.

M. So it is ; and we can easily understand that this miracle was well fitted to convince the disciples that our Lord was able to fulfil the promise which He then made, and which He now repeated, of causing them to become fishers of men. In their labours afterwards in the world as His Apostles, they would often, I dare say, think of this day. If they should meet with great difficulties, and find that the spreading of the Gospel was a slow work, they might turn back their minds to the lake of Gennesareth, and comfort themselves with the thought

that Christ could at any time bless their labours, and allow them to bring multitudes of souls to Him. On the other hand, should their endeavours prosper far beyond their expectations; should they be so happy as to be continually adding numbers to the Christian Church, the remembrance of this miracle might serve to keep them humble; might prevent them from setting too high a value on their own exertions; and lead them instead to say with the Psalmist, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give the praise." How suitable then was such a miracle to the future Apostles of Christ; and especially just at the moment when He was about to call upon them again to follow Him, and to require them from this time to forsake every thing else, that they might become His ministers. "From henceforth," said Christ to Peter, "thou shalt catch men." And from henceforth, giving up their trade as fishermen, with their property, and all their gains, not for a time only, as they had done before, but altogether, "they forsook all and followed Christ."

See *Luke* v. 1—11.

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY EVENING.

THE LEPER CLEANSED.

The next occurrence which we read of in the Gospels is a very remarkable one, the cure of a leper. You know already what a very dreadful disorder leprosy was; for we had occasion to mention it more than once when we were going through the Old Testament.

E. Yes, I remember perfectly the history of Na-

aman the Syrian, who came to the land of Israel to be healed by the Prophet Elisha of his leprosy. Did he not bring a letter from his master the king of Syria to Jehoram king of Israel?

M. He did, and we see how completely this terrible disease was considered beyond the reach of all human aid, by the exclamation of the king of Israel on the occasion: "Am I a God to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send to me to recover a man of his leprosy?" This sickness was indeed far beyond the power of man: no physician however skilful, no king however great, could stay it in its poisonous progress through the human frame. Beginning with one small spot, but bright and burning, it spread from place to place, continually consuming the whole flesh, till at length the hands and feet, and different parts of the body, were quite destroyed by it. It rendered the unhappy persons afflicted by it shocking to behold, and dangerous to approach; for it was fearfully infectious, and dreadfully defiling; affecting even the clothes which the leprous person wore, and the very house in which he dwelt; covering both his garments and his dwelling with its fearful spots. So that, when any poor, miserable being was found to have the least symptom of leprosy about him, he was immediately banished from the dwellings of his fellow men, driven from his family and his friends, and doomed to live in dreary solitude, alone with his misery for ever. Should any one ever accidentally come near him, the law obliged him to cry out, "Unclean, unclean." Not the nearest relative, nor the dearest friend he had, could ever approach him again; the fond wife, the affectionate child, all must give him up; they dared not follow,

however they might love him ; God had thrown a barrier between him and them, which they might wish in vain to pass over. No kind look, no soothing word should ever reach his ears again ! There was, humanly speaking, no hope for him but in the grave.

‘Such was leprosy ; too dreadful even to think of ! you may easily imagine then how ardently a poor leper must have longed to be delivered from a disease, which not only caused him so much misery, but which deprived him of earthly comfort, and made his life “ a sore burden,” too heavy for him to bear.

E. I am so glad he heard of Jesus : there was hope now even for him, Mamma.

M. Yes, my love, even for the leper ; and not only hope, but health too. We see here, in a remarkable manner, what an idea had gone abroad of our Saviour’s power, when we find a man “ full of leprosy” falling down on his face and beseeching Him, saying, “ Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.” Even he, shut out from the society of all men, had heard of the fame of Jesus in one of the cities of Galilee, too obscure to have been mentioned by name. We have here also an astonishing instance of faith. This poor man had no doubt whatever of Jesus’ power to heal even the leprosy, yet he knew, by bitter experience, that it was quite incurable by man ; he therefore must have felt convinced that in Jesus he saw one who was exalted far above the children of men. He believed that, if our Lord chose to do it, He could command a cure for him in a moment. It seems also that he must have had a firm persuasion of our Lord’s love, as well as of His power. For although he durst not, in his wretched and polluted state, have approached

one of his fellow-men, he ventured to draw near to the blessed Jesus, and to throw himself at His feet, not having the smallest doubt but that He had a heart to pity, as well as a hand to heal. “Therefore he came and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.”

And was this poor leper mistaken? Had he raised his hopes too high? Had he trusted too much to the goodness and kindness of Christ? Is the Saviour of the world unwilling to compassionate his misery? Listen to his gracious words: “I will; be thou clean.” See how kindly He treats him! Not only speaking to him in the kindest manner, but even vouchsafing to touch his poor suffering body; not disdaining to lay His hands on him, although the dearest of his earthly friends would have started back with horror and disgust at the very thought. “Jesus put forth his hand and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean!” Oh! wonderful instance of pity and tenderness! Who can hear of it and not exclaim, “What shall separate us from the love of Christ?”

E. And was the leper then healed at once?

M. He was; and that there might be no doubt about it, our Lord commanded him to do what the law required on such occasions: namely, he was to go and show himself to the priests, and submit to the cleansing ceremonies which they desired from him, offering a gift at the same time as a token of his thankfulness.

E. Mamma, I am very glad. I was so sorry for the poor leper! his state seemed so exceedingly dreadful.

M. So dreadful was the case of all these miserable

beings, so frightful the disorder with which they were afflicted, that it was always looked upon by the Jews as a particular mark of God's displeasure. That it was so occasionally, there can be no doubt; as in the instance of Gehazi, which you so well remember, and also (See 2 Chron. xxvi. 19.) of king Uzziah, which perhaps you are not so well acquainted with.

But who can read of this awful sickness without perceiving that it was a most remarkable type of sin. Yes, of *sin*,—that deep, that deadly, that defiling and inveterate disorder, which affects and destroys the soul of man—which spreads through his whole nature, stains and defiles all that he does; makes him miserable here on earth, and shuts him out for ever from the society of heaven.

E. Yes, Mamma; and I think I see one other way in which sin is like the leprosy. Jesus Christ, you know, alone can cure us of it.

M. Quite true, Edward; the Lord Jesus is the only Physician who can heal our souls; sin is a sickness, from which, more or less, we are all sufferers; it is the worst of all disorders, and yet none are exempt from it. Dreadful as it is, none can say he is free; every one of us, who knows any thing of himself, may cry out with the poor lepers of old, "Unclean, unclean." And Oh! that each one of us were aware of our state, and would imitate the poor leper in saying, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." Let us not deceive ourselves, my dear child, on so important a subject; let us not shut our eyes to the real state of our souls by nature, because it is a sorrowful thing to look into it. Let us rather take courage to examine into our hearts, and tempers, and characters; into our

thoughts, words, and actions; that so we may seek a cure. It is a painful discovery, but most necessary if we would be healed. If we do not feel that we are sick, we shall never go to the Great Physician. And yet it is most necessary that we should go to Him; for there is no remedy for our souls any where else. His blood and His Spirit can alone cleanse us from sin; can alone wash us from the guilt and defilement of it, and deliver us from its raging power. Let us then imitate this poor leper, and hasten to our Lord Jesus Christ. We see that there is no fear of His sending us away. Why does the Bible tell us of all the good and gracious things that He did, whilst here on earth? Is it not, that from the case of others we may learn to go to Him ourselves? If we look to Him with the same faith that this unhappy man did, and feel the same assurance that He is both able and willing to help us, we shall find that He has quite as much power to heal our souls, as to cure our bodies. And may we never forget that if the Lord Jesus does not cleanse us from sin; if that leprosy is not removed, it will unfit us for the society of Saints and Angels, and banish us for ever from that heavenly city where no unclean thing can enter.

E. Mamma, there is one thing which I wished to ask you. Other persons besides our Lord have performed miracles, and even healed lepers: you know Naaman was cured by Elisha.

M. It is very true: but there is this difference between the miracles of the Prophets and those of our Lord. The former performed miracles by a power not their own, but lent to them for a time. Thus Elisha, as you say, cured Naaman, or rather

told him how he might obtain a cure, by that spirit of prophecy which had rested before on Elijah, and of which he had asked and obtained a double supply for himself. And several of the miracles wrought by the Prophets, as for instance that one where Elijah restored the little child at Sarepta, and again at Shunem, were not accomplished but by much and earnest prayer. When even Moses, the first and chief of the prophets, in bringing water out of the rock at Meribah, departed, though but a little, from the manner in which God had told him to do it, and spoke as if the miracle had been done by himself and Aaron, he was said to have spoken "unadvisedly with his lips." He was too, for this very offence, denied an entrance into the promised land with the people whom for forty years he had led through the wilderness. It was Christ alone, who could work miracles by His own, as well as by His Father's power; for He and the Father are One. He alone could say, "I will; be thou clean." The prophets spoke and acted as servants: He as Lord of all. This it is which distinguishes their miracles from His; this it is which makes those miracles so many proofs to us of our Lord's divine nature, and shows us that He was really one with God.

It is difficult for us to imagine in any degree the feelings of the leper, when he departed from the Saviour cleansed from his dreadful disorder, in a state to enjoy once more the blessings of life. In proportion as his misery had been deep and awful, must his joy and his thankfulness have been overflowing. Indeed the poor man seems to have suffered his gratitude to outrun his obedience to his gracious Bene-

factor. Our Lord had desired him to tell no man of his cure, until he came to the priest: being unwilling most probably to draw around him a curious crowd, instead of a faithful company of obedient disciples. But he went out and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter, not thinking of the inconvenience this might cause to our Lord, and forgetting that the best way to show our gratitude for Divine mercies, is to do exactly what the Divine Giver commands.

The consequence was, that such crowds again collected together, "that Jesus could no more openly enter into any city, but was without in desert places." Several days were spent in these lonely places in prayer, before our Lord returned again to Capernaum, which had now the great honour of being called "His own city," because it had become the usual place of His abode.

But here we must end our conversation for to night. May the Blessed Spirit of God make it not only pleasant, but profitable to our souls!

See *Matt.* viii. 2—4. *Mark* i. 40—45. *Luke* v. 12—16.



NINETEENTH SUNDAY EVENING.

THE PARALYTIC CURED.

M. As soon as it was heard that Jesus was in a house at Capernaum, crowds collected again immediately to hear Him, and amongst them were many Pharisees and Teachers of the Law, who had come

from all the villages of Galilee, and even from Judea and Jerusalem. So great was the assembly of people, that there was no room to receive any more, even about the door or gate.

E. What a large house it must have been, Mamma, to contain such crowds of people ! Were the Jews' houses so much larger than ours ?

M. The houses in Eastern climates, though not perhaps so lofty and substantial as ours, generally contain more spacious apartments than is usual with us. But besides this they were built in a different manner from that of our common dwellings ; being erected in the form of a square, enclosing a court-yard, with long galleries about it, within the building which formed the dwelling. But if you bring Calmet's Dictionary of the Bible to me, I will show you a picture of one of these houses, which will give you a much better idea of them than any mere description. There you will see the spacious court in the middle, with the galleries all round it, and the windows opening into it. It was probably in some such court that the crowd was now assembled, so as to fill every part and prevent any further entrance at the gate. There they thronged again around our Lord, who as usual made use of so good an opportunity of preaching the word to them. Whilst thus engaged, Jesus in teaching, and the multitudes around humbly listening, we trust, to His blessed instruction, an extraordinary but interesting circumstance occurred, which put a stop at that time to His discourse, and led Him to give them a striking proof of the reality of those precious truths, which He was perhaps at that very moment unfolding to them. A man sick of the palsy was suddenly let

down from the roof upon his bed at the feet of Jesus ! He had been brought to the house by four of his anxious and pitying friends, in the hope of obtaining relief for him, and of seeing him restored once more to the use of his limbs ; for the sickness, called the palsy, under which he was suffering, had made him a complete cripple, utterly unable to move hand or foot.

In vain was it for such a party, four men carrying a couch, to force its way through such a crowd, or even to get in at the gate which was already thronged to excess. What, then, were they to do ? Should they turn back, and take the poor paralytic home again, disappointed of the only hope he had ? Oh ! no ; they were too kind to do this, too anxious to relieve his sufferings, too sure of the power and compassion of Jesus, to think for a moment of carrying him away. Their faith suggests to them a plan by which they may still bring the sick man to the feet of Jesus. Though they could not enter at the gate, what should hinder them from going up upon the roof, which was flat like all the houses in Eastern countries ?

E. Yes, just as Rahab's house at Jericho, Mamma, where she hid the spies. I understand that.

M. And such was the case at Capernaum. It appears too that there were commonly stairs from without, going up to the roof, so that these truly kind persons might easily, though not indeed without much more trouble to themselves, bring their sick friend to the top of the house. They determined therefore to do this ; and when they had got him there, they seem to have undone a part of the parapet wall, which surrounded the flat roof, and let down the bed with cords

into the midst before Jesus. What a striking scene it must have been ! What a touching appeal to the compassion of our Lord ! Not a word was said ; not a prayer was uttered ; but none were needed. The silent faith of these men spoke more loudly than any words could have done ! There lies the paralytic at the feet of Jesus ; utterly unable to help himself, his eye fixed, no doubt, on the only one in all that multitude who could do any thing for him ! Whilst those faithful friends who had given such valuable proof of their love, by taking so much pains to bring him within reach of the Saviour's help, remain above, silently looking down upon the interesting scene, and waiting in faith and patience for the blessed result.

E. And I am sure, Mamma, they will find our Lord as gracious to them, as he has been to every one else.

M. Indeed they will. Their exertions had been great, and the result was abundantly sufficient to reward them. The Bible tells us that, when Jesus saw their faith, He said unto the sick of the palsy, " Son, thy sins be forgiven thee."

See what a blessing that faith received. How much more have they obtained, than what they asked. When the Lord gives, He gives exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think. This poor man had only expected bodily healing ; but Christ restores and heals his soul. " Son, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee : " thus our Saviour would teach the sufferer himself and all around that *sin* was the original cause of all sorrow and suffering, of all our pains and sicknesses ; and would lead their thoughts off from the disease, to the sin which was the cause of that disease, that they might desire above all a

remedy for that; that all might learn that pardon of sin is one of the richest blessings that man can receive, or the Lord bestow. Indeed what does every other blessing avail without this? If we are still in our sins, what good shall life or health do to us? But a little while, at best, can these things be of any avail. Sickness and death may be delayed for a few years, but they must come at last; and then, if our sins are not pardoned, not blotted out in the blood of Jesus, what will remain for us but a wretchedness deep and eternal? Try then, my dear child, to think more of your soul than your body. Be more anxious that Christ should pardon and save you, than you are for health or life, or any earthly blessings. In this story we are reminded, that though sickness is, no doubt, a great affliction, it is often a great mercy too. To persons without number it has been so blessed by God, as to lead them to see and feel their sins, and to go to our Lord Jesus Christ for pardon and deliverance from them: and thus the sickness of the body has been eternal health and life to the soul. It is many centuries ago since David said, "Blessed is the man whose iniquity is forgiven, whose sin is covered;" but the precious truth remains the same, and we may depend upon it that those are the only really happy persons, whose sin is forgiven. But let us return to our interesting story. You will be anxious to know what became of the poor paralytic, upon whose ears those gracious words had sounded, "Son, thy sins are forgiven thee." Welcome declaration, no doubt, to him! But not so to all. There were present, as I have mentioned, some Pharisees and doctors of the law, or scribes, who, upon hearing our Saviour's words,

began to reason in their hearts, respecting the power of Jesus to forgive sins, and to accuse him of blasphemy, or grievous sin against God in taking upon himself that power which belonged only to the Most High. They spoke indeed nothing, but little did they imagine that their very thoughts were open to Christ; little did they expect to receive from Him an answer even to those thoughts. How astonished must they have been when Jesus turned towards them and said, "Whether is easier to say, thy sins be forgiven thee, or to say, arise and take up thy bed and walk?" And then, that they might know that He had power on earth to forgive sins, He turned to the sick of the palsy and said, "Arise, and take up thy bed and go unto thy house." I need hardly tell you that, at that word, the sick man immediately arose, and, as a proof that his health and strength were entirely restored to him, he took up his bed before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God.

Thus did our Lord show and prove, for the comfort of all who know and feel their sins, that, though the power of forgiving them is most truly a Divine power, yet it belongs to Him; for, though Son of man, He is Son of God too. If He could, in a moment and by a word, enable a cripple to walk and carry his bed, surely He must be able to forgive sins also. You remember how much I said to you last Sunday about the leprosy being a type of sin. We saw that Christ could cure the leper, though none else could; and in His next miracle, which we are now considering, He seems gladly to take the opportunity of assuring us that He is as able and as willing to heal the soul.

How thankful ought we to be that He has made this precious truth so clear and plain to us; that He has declared so fully and so freely that He is indeed able to forgive sins, so that we may go to Him without any fear, and feel quite sure that He will blot out all our iniquities. We have seen how, when here on earth, He took on Him "our infirmities, and bore our sicknesses," by delivering all the afflicted sufferers who were brought to Him from all their various diseases: when we read of these extraordinary and gracious miracles, let us find in them abundant and convincing proof that He has undertaken and is able to "bear also all our sins," and that He has a right to forgive them. Let us look upon every cure which He wrought as the seal of this blessed truth, and learn to feel more and more confident that, if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness; for "to the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, although we have rebelled against Him".

In reading the miracles of Christ, this is their great use, to increase our faith in Him; to enable us to look up to Him as One who has power, for which He afterwards paid the price in His own blood, to forgive our sins, and to remove that which is the root of all our sorrows. For without sin there would be no sorrow. The people were astonished and glorified God, when they saw one, who had lately been lying weak and helpless, rise up suddenly and carry home his couch, restored at once to activity and strength. And shall not we too glorify God, who has given such power to the Son of man; remembering, that though He is no longer on earth to work these bodily cures,

He is ever ready to exert His power in delivering us from sin and restoring our souls to the health and activity of a holy life.

See *Matt.* ix. 2—8. *Mark* ii. 1—12. *Luke* v. 17—26.

TWENTIETH SUNDAY EVENING.

THE CALL OF ST. MATTHEW.

M. After the cure of the paralytic our Lord went out again by the side of the lake of Gennesareth, where He sees Matthew or Levi, as he was also called, sitting at the receipt of custom.

E. What does that mean, Mamma?

M. It means that Matthew was one of the officers called publicans, of whom we frequently read in the Gospel. With us a publican means the keeper of what is called a public-house for the accommodation of travellers, from whence he takes his name. But amongst the Jews, and indeed throughout the whole Roman Empire, the term publican had a very different meaning: it was applied to those who undertook to collect the public taxes of various kinds, which were paid to the Romans by the different nations whom they had conquered. Now these different sums of money the publicans received, agreeing to pay a certain sum every year to the Roman government for them; so that whatever they collected over and above that sum was so much gain to themselves. This was clearly a great temptation to them to make as much

of the taxes as they could, and, for that purpose, to be guilty very often of great extortion, that is, of making people pay more than the law required.

E. But that was very wrong, Mamma ?

M. So it was; and it is a great pity that men do not think more of right and wrong, than of their own passing interest. Our Saviour bids us think, how poor an exchange it would be to gain the whole world, and at the same time lose our own souls; which unjust men must do, unless they repent; for the Scripture tells us expressly that the unjust shall not inherit the kingdom of heaven. I trust you will always remember these things, and never think it profitable, which in the end it cannot be, but full of danger, to take any unjust or any unfair advantage of others. Unhappily mankind too often overlook their best interests, and, thinking only of present advantage, forget that, even in this world, honesty is almost always the best policy: so that we must not wonder, however we may grieve at human corruption, that the publicans should very commonly give way to the temptations of their office. Their covetousness and injustice brought with it, however, in some degree, its own punishment; for they became hateful to all around them, and were always classed amongst the worst of men, being considered in fact as little better than thieves. Thus "publicans and sinners" was a common expression of contempt and abhorrence among the Jews: those among their own nation that would accept so degrading an employment were looked upon as heathen, and were scarcely allowed to enter into the temple, or the synagogues, or to share in any of the privileges of those around them,

E. I remember, Mamma, that some of these people came to hear John the Baptist preach.

M. And you may recollect that he said to them, "Exact no more than that which is appointed you." From this, and other passages, which we shall perhaps have occasion to mention by and bye, we perceive what the common conduct of the publicans was, and that it was not without cause that they were so odious in the eyes of the people. Yet even from this despised class of men our Lord condescends to choose one of His apostles; so free is His grace, so unbounded His love and compassion, in calling to Himself many and many a sinner, who is not, perhaps, thinking at all of Him, and whose outward circumstances seem to have placed him out of the reach of all spiritual blessings.

E. Then do you think, Mamma, that Matthew was as wicked as other publicans?

M. I cannot say, my love; for the Bible is silent on the subject. It is often supposed that he was like the rest, unjust, covetous, and oppressive; but we cannot assert it, lest we should form an uncharitable conclusion. True it is, Matthew is dead; but death does not close the views of the Christian. Those who have died in the Lord we hope to be united to, in another world, in a closer and dearer society than that which binds us to our earthly neighbours; and surely we should not like to think, on meeting such persons in heaven, especially if they had been eminent servants of Christ, that we had brought false accusations against them here below. No: we should tread with reverence on the graves of the departed, and hold their reputations dear; nor on any account

bestow on them a single word of blame beyond the strict and clear line of truth.

But whether Matthew had disgraced himself with the same sins which were common to most publicans, or whether he had been just and upright in the midst of temptations to the contrary, it is impossible for us to say. One would hardly think that a really honest man would have liked so hateful an office, or that any one would have willingly placed himself in such company, if he had not at least been greedy of gain. But little at any rate was he likely to have been thinking of leaving his occupation for the sake of Christ, when our Lord passed by and commanded him to follow Him. He was sitting at the time at the receipt of custom, collecting the taxes which were paid, probably, by the fishermen and others on the traffic of the lake. Little did he expect, I dare say, to have so great an honour conferred upon him, as to be chosen before so many others, to become not merely a disciple, but a constant companion of Christ. Much must he have been surprised when he saw the eyes of the blessed Jesus fixed upon him, and heard those gracious words addressed to him, "Follow me."

E. Oh ! I do hope he did not prefer his riches to Christ. I do hope, Mamma, that he felt what an honour Christ did him, and that he was rejoiced to leave his disgraceful business and become our Lord's disciple.

M. I am happy to tell you that he did : for Christ not only said to him, "Follow me;" but He caused these words to touch his heart. He spoke there by His Spirit, so that his soul immediately obeyed, and none of the temptations of the world could keep him

back. No, he heard his Saviour's voice, and immediately arose and followed Him.

We have seen what power our Lord possessed over evil spirits and bodily disease; we have here an instance of His complete power also over the hearts of men. We see that He can order at His pleasure even the unruly wills and affections of sinful men, and give a power to one word of His which shall throw down every hindrance, make all that the world can offer appear as vanity, and lead the heart to give up every thing for His sake.

Yet Matthew had great sacrifices to make for Christ; for he was a rich man, as we see by his making for our Lord a great feast; and he was probably growing richer every day; yet he rose up at once and left all that he had to follow Christ. He gave up that occupation in which he had grown rich, to become a constant attendant upon One, who did not possess Himself, nor promise to His followers, any riches or even comforts of this world; but who told them plainly that they must expect not only poverty, but persecution.

E. That was very strange, Mamma; particularly as he knew nothing of our Lord before.

M. It shows, my love, as I said before, how powerful the grace of Christ is to change the heart of man. But I do not think we should be right in supposing that Matthew knew nothing of our Lord before.

When we remember how great the fame of Jesus had been, especially in the neighbourhood of Capernaum, it seems probable that Matthew must not only have heard of Him before, but have seen some of His miracles, and listened to His teaching; and in the proofs which He there gave of His divine wisdom and

power, there could be nothing wanting in the way of outward evidence to convince all, that He was "the Son of God, the King of Israel." But at the same time we know well that outward evidence is not enough to make a sincere Christian; for if it were, there would be a far greater number in the world than there really are. Christ Himself has taught us that without Him we can do nothing that is good. He has told us again that "No man can come unto him except the Father draw him." It was under the influence of the Spirit of God no doubt, that Matthew obeyed the command of Christ, and at His bidding left all his worldly possessions and prospects, in order to become His servant. Happy those who can as readily now resign whatever Christ in His word commands them to renounce! Happy those who, for the sake of being His disciples, can give up their own wills; struggle continually against their own corruptions; mortify their evil tempers and passions; and willingly renounce the riches and honours of the world, whenever they at all interfere with their love to Christ, or would lead them to offend their Saviour! We are not now called upon indeed to follow Christ personally as the Apostles did through poverty and persecution; but a disposition like theirs is necessary at all times; and if we only look into our own hearts, and then into the world around us, we shall soon see that there is enough still to be given up for Christ's sake. Many a hard struggle to be made; many a thing very dear to us, which must be parted with, if we would, though not as personal attendants, yet as obedient disciples, obey that gracious call, "Follow Me."

I told you that Matthew made a great feast for our

blessed Lord: this he did probably to show his thankfulness to Christ, and to do Him honour in the best manner that he could. This proof of his love and gratitude was kindly received by his gracious Lord; for we are told that Jesus sat at meat at his house. We are also told, as a further proof of His amazing condescension and compassion, that there sat, at the same table with Jesus and His disciples, “a great company of publicans and sinners.” That publicans should be found at Matthew’s table we are not surprised. It was natural that he should invite those to whose number he himself belonged, and with whom he had been accustomed to associate: it was also Christian-like that he should desire to bring his companions near to Christ, the Saviour of the world. Nor do we wonder that where publicans are we should see sinners too; that is, men who had been open and grievous offenders against God; for such were too many of them. But we may be surprised, we may be inclined to wonder, as many who were at that feast did wonder, to see the pure and holy Jesus sit down there. To see one so holy, one who came to teach men the way of holiness, mixing thus intimately with unholy and openly wicked men, so as to sit and eat at the same table with them! and yet it is clear that our Lord did this very calmly and deliberately. For when the Scribes and Pharisees could not contain their surprise, and asked His disciples “How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners?” our Lord explained to them that he was only doing *that*, which He came into the world for the express purpose of doing. When Jesus heard it, He saith unto them: “They that are whole need

not a physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." How plainly did this answer declare that all men are sinners in the sight of God; that "there is none righteous, no not one." For surely our Lord would not have left his eternal home in the heaven of heavens to recall righteous beings into the path of duty. Surely those must have been sinners, whom He at so great a cost came to bring to repentance. Surely, "if He died for *all*, then were *all* dead." Oh! what a reproof was there in those blessed words, for all who, like these proud Scribes and Pharisees, fancied themselves righteous:—they are sick indeed, even unto death, but they know it not; therefore they do not see their need of a physician, and do not seek to him for a cure. These are not the persons whom Jesus came to save. The really sick, those who know and feel themselves to be sinners before God, to them this gracious Saviour came. To them He spoke those comforting words, "I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance; for they that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." The Pharisees you see found great fault with Him for associating with those whom they considered as great sinners; therefore our Lord explains to them that He does not move among such persons, as their companion, but as their *physician*. Just as if our Lord had said, "With whom should a physician converse, but with his sick patients? Now I am come into the world to act the part of a kind physician unto men; surely then I must go among them, I must take all opportunities of conversing with them, that I may help and heal them; for they that are sick need the physician: but as for you, Scribes and Pharisees,

who think yourselves well, I have no hopes of doing good unto you; for such as think themselves well desire no physician's help."

E. Then these Pharisees, Mamma, were not righteous, though they complained of our Lord for eating with sinners?

M. No, Edward; and had our Saviour acted as they proposed, and declined to eat with sinners, He must have refused to accept of their invitations, which we shall find He did not, as well as that of Matthew. For though they were very strict in their outward conduct, and on that account had a great contempt for the publicans, they were by no means free themselves. For not only does the Scripture represent all the world guilty before God, but by St. John the Baptist's account, and indeed by what our Saviour Himself says, we see that the Pharisees were more than commonly wanting in righteousness. They made indeed a great show of religion; but generally it was mere show: their hearts and secret lives being full of wickedness. Even in the better sort of them pride spoiled all they did, and caused the penitent publican to be far more pleasing in the sight of God than they, or than any who, like them, boast of their righteousness, and think they have no need of repentance.

E. Oh! but, dear Mamma, I am sure we all need repentance.

M. Indeed we do, my child; we have every one of us offended against God in thought, word, and deed; we have all "erred and strayed from His ways like lost sheep;" and unless we repent and return to the Great Shepherd of our souls we must perish. This is

what our Saviour's words mean, that the world which He came to call to repentance, is not a righteous, but a sinful world. There may be other beings, like the Holy Angels, who need no repentance; but man is fallen and corrupt; his moral nature altogether disordered by sin, and greatly needing the help of the Physician. When our blessed Lord ate and drank with sinners, He taught us that such are those whom He came to save; that such are we, and that, until we feel ourselves to be such, and go to Him with humble and deep repentance for help, we can have no share in His Salvation. We must not indeed suppose that, by eating and drinking with sinners, our Lord meant to encourage sin. Oh no! He went among sinners to call them to repentance; He visited those who were spiritually sick, to cure them, not to increase their disease.

Our Lord's presence at this feast led the Pharisees to ask another question, about fasting; they came to Jesus and said, "Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but thy disciples fast not?" Fasting is in itself neither good nor bad. It has been chiefly used by pious persons, for the sake of humbling themselves before God in seasons of sorrow. Now it was, at this very time, a season of great sorrow to John's disciples; for he was in prison, and fit was it for them to mourn and lament. But to the disciples of Jesus, especially to Matthew, who gave the feast, and the other Apostles, this season was not yet come. On the contrary they were rejoicing in having so lately been called to follow the Son of God wherever He went; they had their blessed Lord and Master continually with them, and they little knew how soon He

would be taken away from them. This then was no time with them to weep ; mourning and fasting would have been as unnatural in them as weeping at a marriage feast : and this was what our Lord meant when He said, in reply to their questions, “ Can the children of the bridechamber fast, when the bridegroom is with them ? But the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.” Yes when the blessed Jesus should return to His Father and leave them alone, then indeed they would have good cause to weep and lament ; but they cannot grieve much for any thing whilst He is still with them. Solomon, the wisest of men, had said long before, “ There is a time to weep, and a time to laugh ;” and One greater than Solomon has here taught us, that there is a time to feast and a time to fast. To grieve when God gives us happiness, would be, as our Saviour said, like repairing an old garment with new cloth, which must make the rent worse ; or like putting new wine before the fermentation has ceased, into old leathern bottles such as are used in Eastern countries. The consequence would be that the bottles would burst, and the wine would be spoiled.

As unreasonable would it have been to put grief into the hearts of the disciples in the midst of their joy at finding such a Saviour, and being called expressly by Himself to follow Him. The time, alas ! would come when they would be inclined enough to sorrow ; but it would have been as unnatural for them now to mourn, as for one who has tasted old wine, immediately to ask for new. For as old wine is better than new, so is joy, when God permits it to visit us,

to be preferred to sorrow. Only it is good for us, when we are happy, to remember Who it is that allows us to be so, and not to suffer the happiness that He gives to lead our hearts away from the Giver. It is also good for us to remember that joy cannot stay with us always in this world; that times of sorrow may and will come. Let us bear this in mind, that we may make sure of Christ for our Friend in the time of trouble. But we must now bring our conversation to a close, for it has already occupied us for a long time.

E. Only let me ask you one question, Mamma. Is Matthew the publican the same as St. Matthew who wrote the Gospel?

M. He is, and we have the satisfaction of knowing that he was from the first an eye-witness of our Lord's labours. For though God gave His Holy Spirit to guide the sacred writers, He does not unnecessarily work miracles. One great end which was answered in choosing the Apostles, was, that they thus became witnesses continually of what our Lord did and suffered; so that they could afterwards bear their testimony to Christ, by their preaching in different nations, and some of them by their writings, which still remain the light and ornament of the Christian Church.

See *Matt.* ix. 9. *Mark* ii. 13—22. *Luke* v. 27—39.

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY EVENING.

THE POOL OF BETHESDA.

M. You will remember, Edward, that the first public opening of our blessed Lord's ministry took place

in the temple at Jerusalem, at the time of the pass-over ; after which He went, as we have seen, through Samaria into Galilee ; and in that country He seems to have continued until the time drew near for another passover, when He again went up to Jerusalem. Wherever He went, mercy still followed His steps. You have heard how He went about Galilee doing good ; it was so also in Jerusalem, where we are now about to accompany Him. And in what part of that great city shall we be most likely to find our Lord ? Shall we seek for Him in her splendid palaces, or her crowded streets, among the rich and the great, the busy or the gay ? No ; the search would be useless there ! we had better look for Him among the abodes of the wretched, the sick, or the dying ; and if there be one spot, in all that great city, more peculiarly miserable than another, there shall we be most sure of finding our Redeemer. And is there such a spot ? There is.

We read in the Gospel of St. John, that there was at Jerusalem a pool, which is called in the Hebrew language Bethesda, that is, “the house of compassion ;” it had five porches about it, and was remarkable for some wonderful cures which God permitted to be performed there by an angel, who descended at certain periods into the pool, and troubled or disturbed the waters ; “and whosoever then first, after the troubling of the water, stepped in, was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.”

E. But, Mamma, was it not a strange thing that an angel should come down from heaven to cure diseases ? Did that often happen ?

M. At the time our Saviour appeared upon earth,

we find that both good and evil angels were permitted to do many things of which we never hear now. But that power seems to have ceased when Messiah had finished His work. Having the Gospel to tell us plainly of another world, and to remind us continually of the glories of heaven, as well as of the miseries of that world where the evil spirits dwell, we have less reason to have our attention roused to these subjects by the appearance of angels, whether evil or good; and therefore, perhaps, it is, that since the preaching of the Gospel things have been established under the dominion of Christ in a more regular course than they were before. But let us return to our story. If these waters possessed such a wonderful quality, we cannot be surprised that they were very highly valued, and eagerly resorted to; so that the porches of Bethesda were crowded with a great multitude of sick people, blind, halt, withered, who lay there waiting for the moving of the water. But not more than one cure could take place at a time in those waters, and that only at certain seasons. Whoever stepped in *first* was healed, whatever his complaint might be; but he alone out of all that multitude: the rest were disappointed.

E. And what a disappointment it must have been, Mamma!

M. Indeed it must, after such long and anxious watching, as I dare say in many a case there must have been. But the power of the angel was not, like that of Christ, unlimited; working miracles without number, and that whenever He chose: here many might come day after day, yet obtain no cure! So that we can scarcely imagine a scene of greater misery than

the porch of Bethesda must have presented at such seasons as these. Yet this was the spot which the blessed Redeemer was pleased to visit immediately, it should seem, on His arrival at Jerusalem !

E. Oh, Mamma, I am so glad Jesus went there, for He would be sure to help some of those poor sufferers !

M. There was one case of more than common misery which drew our Lord's notice, and excited His deep and tender compassion. Or rather it was, most likely, this very case, long known to Him, that led Him to visit the melancholy spot. A certain man was there, who had been a severe sufferer for thirty-eight years, and had been in the habit of coming to Bethesda in the hope of obtaining a cure. But all in vain. He seems to have been a poor solitary man, without any kind friend or relative to comfort him under his affliction, or to endeavour to obtain relief for him. There was no one sufficiently interested about him, to put him into the water ; and being too weak to walk alone, without some friendly arm to lean upon, he could never reach the water in time, but always, whilst he was slowly coming towards it, some happier person stepped in first, and was made whole, instead of him ! Such was the case which presented itself to the compassion and mercy of our Saviour. And do not our hearts ache within us, as we think of that poor lonely man, who for thirty-eight years had been suffering, and perhaps during all that time had been exposed to continual disappointments ?

E. Oh ! go on, dear Mamma ; I am sure our Lord will have pity upon him.

M. Yes; though he little expected it, his affliction was well nigh at an end. He was destitute of human help; but there was one to whom all his sorrows had been known; one who had watched over him during all those long and lonely years, and was now about to appear openly to his help. The Bible tells us that, “when Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole?”

E. Our Lord must have known, Mamma, very well, that there was nothing which that poor man wished so very much as to be made whole. How could He then ask him such a question?

M. Our Lord does, indeed, know the desires of all our hearts, but still He requires that we should express those desires to Him. He has said in His word, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find.” The unhappy man simply told our Saviour his affecting case; in the humble hope that he had at length met with some one who would be kind enough to help him into the water. This, most probably, was the very utmost he had hoped; but how far beyond his expectations was the relief he was about to obtain! He did not know that he had laid his distress before one who had not only a heart to pity, but a hand to heal; that he had at length met with a person, who was not selfishly wrapped up in his own concerns; one who “pleased not himself.” What must have been his surprise then when Jesus said unto him, “Rise, take up thy bed and walk?” and when he found that he was immediately able to obey the command. He who had been unable a moment before to move without the greatest difficulty, by reason of

his infirmity, was now, at the command of Christ, strong enough not only to walk freely, but even to carry the bed on which he lay.

E. Then, Mamma, he must have believed that Christ would heal him of his sickness, or else he would not have attempted to carry his bed.

M. There can be no doubt that he had some such confidence in our Lord, for Christ always required faith in those whom He healed; if this sick man had not had faith, he would probably have complained that the command was unreasonable, and could not be obeyed. How could such an invalid as he was, rise all at once, and even carry his own bed? No; if he had not had a true and lively faith, he would indeed have found it impossible to obey our Lord; but to those who believe, the hardest things become comparatively smooth and easy. It is thus, my child, that for want of faith we often complain of the commands which Christ still gives to us in His written word. We think it impossible for our poor disordered nature to obey the exhortations addressed to us in the Gospel; such as those which call upon us to be pure in heart, to seek heavenly things, to love our neighbour as ourselves, to render to no man evil for evil; and others of the same kind. Hard, indeed, would all such commands be to sinful creatures like us, if we were left to ourselves: but, remember, when the Son of God gives a command, He gives also strength to obey it; and if He strengthen us, we may say, as St. Paul did, "I can do all things, that are required of me, through Christ which strengtheneth me!" To Him neither time nor number is any impediment: nor is any past infirmity, whether of body or soul, too great for Him to remove.

He can supply grace to all who trust in Him, at all times, and under every need. Immediately when Jesus commanded him, the sick man at the Pool of Bethesda took up his bed and walked.

E. How astonished the people must have been at such a change; I suppose, Mamma, they felt great wonder and reverence for our Lord, when they saw what He had done?

M. That would have been natural; or rather that would have been right, Edward: but it was not what the Jews felt. And I am afraid if we had been Jews of that day, it is not what we should have felt. For, unhappily, it is far from being natural to us to feel as we might. The Jews, in fact, were thinking more of their own prejudices, than of the gracious miracle which Christ had wrought. It was the Sabbath-day: a day set apart to God from the beginning of the world, and a day which, you well know, the Jews were solemnly commanded from Mount Sinai, to keep holy unto the Lord. On this day no manner of work was done. It was to be employed altogether not in man's service, but in the more immediate service of God. For wishing so to employ it, the Jews were not to be blamed. It was right and necessary to keep the Sabbath-day holy, and to separate it from all other days. But here lies the mistake into which the Pharisees had led the Jewish people. They did not understand the real nature of holiness; they perverted God's service; placing it in strict outward ceremonies, some of which were no where commanded by the Lord; and all of which were of very little importance, *compared* with those works of kindness and real piety, which they, in their blind zeal, would not allow to be

done on the Sabbath-day. To do good to man on the Sabbath, by feeding the hungry, relieving the sick, or comforting the afflicted; these works of mercy, so pleasing in God's sight, and so acceptable even on the Sabbath, were hateful to the Pharisees; as if God delighted in ceremonies, more than seeing men love one another; as if He preferred sacrifices to deeds of mercy; and cared not how unfeeling men were, provided they were punctual in all the outward parts of devotion, which unhappily were all that the Pharisees in general cared about.

Now, our Lord was always particularly careful to correct these false views of religion; He taught men that works of compassion are peculiarly well pleasing to the merciful and gracious God, being the works in which He Himself is continually engaged. He declared too that so far from being unsuitable to the Sabbath day, it is especially becoming on that day to imitate the goodness of our heavenly Father; nay more, that we do evil in his sight, if, on that day, we pass by opportunities of relieving our fellow creatures, which, if lost then, may not occur again. Suppose for instance, my dear Edward, a poor hungry person, perishing for want of food, and having no means of procuring it, were to ask you on the Lord's day to give him something to eat, would it be wrong in you to take some trouble at once to get it for him?

E. No, Mamma: I think it would be unkind and cruel to send the poor man empty away; and I am sure God would forgive me, if I were even obliged, though it were Sunday, to take a great deal of trouble to get him some food.

M. Not only would He forgive you, but I think it would be displeasing to the Father of mercies and

to our compassionate Redeemer, if you were to turn away from such a case, under pretence of keeping the Sabbath holy, and serving God better some other way. Our Lord has so clearly taught us this lesson, that it is impossible to doubt it. The Jews, indeed, ought to have known it also; for their own prophets had plainly told them, that it was not to outward fasting, and the outward observance of holy days that the Lord looked, but to the inward feelings, and tempers of their hearts, and to the actions in which these tempers should shine forth. I hear God declaring to them by the lips of his holy servant Isaiah, "Is not this the fast which I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free; and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily, and thy righteousness shall go before thee: the glory of the Lord shall be thy rearward. Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shalt answer; thou shalt cry, and He shall say, Here I am." You see this language was very plain, and left the Pharisees without any excuse for pretending that works of mercy were unfit employment for the sacred rest of the Sabbath. But if there could be any doubt on the matter our Lord, has entirely removed it. He seems almost to have taken express occasion to perform some of his wonderful acts of kindness on the Sabbath, and in the very midst of the synagogue, as if to put mercy forward as a very striking feature in his religion, and to show how in-

separably it is united to true piety. He called it "doing evil" to omit "doing good." Not "to save life," when he could, was in his opinion "to destroy it." Therefore we read repeatedly in the Gospels, of his healing on the Sabbath day; as for example, on one occasion, a man with a withered hand; on another a poor woman, who had been bowed down with a complaint, which she had had for eighteen years; and again, a man with a dropsy; as well as this poor man who had been for thirty-eight years afflicted with sickness.

E. But, Mamma, though our Lord did works of mercy on the Sabbath day, I suppose He kept it holy, and did not allow people to spend it just as they do other days?

M. Far from it; our Lord encouraged no labours on the Sabbath, but those of "necessity, piety, and charity." He would not, for instance, to please the Pharisees, allow his disciples to go without food on the Sabbath, and so become unfit for its sacred employments. This was a work of *necessity* on their part, and of kindness on His. As to works of *piety*, and more particularly the public worship of God, He has left us an example, by always, wherever He was, attending the Jewish synagogue; for this, out of Jerusalem, and away from the temple, was their church; there our Saviour at all times went on the Sabbath; and there he taught the people. And no where do we find Christ engaged Himself, or encouraging others to be engaged, in works of business or common daily toil on the Lord's day. On the contrary He taught that the Sabbath was made for *man*, that is, for all men, and not for the *Jews* only; to be to all, as the

very name signifies, a blessed *rest* from their daily labours ; but not a snare, nor a hardship, nor a barrier against human kindness and sympathy.

E. I think I understand now about the Sabbath, that we are to keep it holy, as our Lord did, and not as the Pharisees.

M. Yes, my dear boy : they were but blind guides at the best ; sadly mistaking the true spirit of religion : but the example and teaching of Christ can never mislead us. From Him we shall learn to keep holy the Sabbath day, in a manner that shall be really pleasing to God ; to rest from one and all our common labours and employments, excepting such as are necessary to our sustenance, that we may spend the day as much as possible in works of piety and charity. So shall we cultivate that love to God and our fellow-creatures, which it will be our delight hereafter to feel and exercise throughout the ceaseless Sabbath of eternity. It is for this endless and glorious rest, remaining hereafter for the people of God, that all our earthly Sabbaths are intended to prepare us.

We may now, I think, go on with the story of the poor man who was healed at the pool of Bethesda, and whom our Lord commanded, though it was now the Sabbath, to take up his bed and walk. You will understand that it was a work of mercy in our Lord, quite befitting the holy day, to cure this poor man, and that it was also an act of piety, by which God was glorified, that the man who had been thus miraculously restored to health and strength, should give proof to the people, as Christ commanded, by carrying the bed on which he had lain so long a helpless invalid. But the Jews were full of prejudice and

hatred to Christ; and they would not consider the difference between carrying burdens for traffic or business, and a sick man's carrying his bed to show what God had done for him, and that too at the express command of Him, who had miraculously healed him. They immediately began to inquire in anger where he was that had given such a command; but Jesus, it seems, had conveyed Himself away. There were a great multitude of people in the place, whom our Lord was no doubt unwilling to stir up either in his favour or against him. It had been said of Christ, by the prophet Isaiah, "He shall not cry, nor lift up his voice, nor cause it to be heard in the streets." Accordingly, we find our Lord avoiding all noise and strife, and shunning all public applause.

E. Then did not the sick man see our Lord any more, Mamma?

M. Christ met him afterwards in the temple, where he had gone, as we may well suppose, to return thanks to God for his wonderful cure. Here our Lord graciously warned him to beware of sin, lest he should bring down upon himself fresh afflictions, and greater perhaps than that from which he had just been delivered: "Behold, thou art made whole," said Jesus; "sin no more; lest a worse thing come unto thee."

E. Then had this man been a great sinner, Mamma, that he had suffered so much?

M. We cannot venture to say that he was a great sinner, compared with other men. It would be very unbecoming in us, and highly dangerous, to measure men's sins by their sufferings. Many are the troubles of the righteous; and some of the most favoured servants of God have been remarkable for what they suffered;

whilst, on the other hand, we often see the wicked in great outward prosperity, and flourishing for a long time, as the Psalmist says, without any changes, like the ever-green bay-tree. Yet without presuming to judge individuals, this we may be sure of, that there never would have been in the world either sorrow or sickness, if there had not been sin: we may learn too, that such troubles then answer the purpose for which they are sent, when they put us on our guard against sin, teach us to hate and dread that which has been the bitter root of so much evil, and lead us to seek more and more the cleansing and sanctifying grace of Christ our Saviour. If our troubles are not thus blessed to us by the Spirit of God, we may well expect that He will change His gentle chastisements into heavy punishments; and either use severe methods of bringing us back to Him, or else, (and oh! how far worse would that be!) hide His face from us in displeasure. Let us think then, after every sickness and every sorrow, that we hear our Saviour saying to us as He did to this poor infirm man, whom He had restored to health and strength; "Thou art made whole: sin no more; lest a worse thing come unto thee."

When the Jews learnt who it was that had bidden the man to carry his bed, they followed Jesus, and sought to put Him to death. So dreadful is the force of prejudice! so completely does it harden the heart against the voice of reason and truth! in vain did our Lord tell them that the works which He performed were in fact the works of God His Father, by whose authority and power He wrought all His miracles. So far from being softened by this answer,

the Jews were only the more enraged, because He had not only broken the Sabbath, as they thought, but called God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.

E. But was He not equal with God? I am sure we are taught in our Church Catechism, Mamma, to believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost; so I thought there was no difference.

M. Whatever the Church in the Catechism teaches us we may firmly believe; for all that it contains is taken from the word of God. She does indeed instruct us very properly to believe in the holy, blessed, and glorious Trinity; God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; for such is the doctrine of Scripture. Our Lord Himself said, "I and my Father are one; he that hath seen me hath seen the Father:" and on this occasion when the Jews sought to kill Him, for calling God His own Father, and making Himself equal with God, He did not try to undeceive them, as if they had mistaken His words. On the contrary, He went on to speak of Himself as the Son of God, and as doing His works by the power of God, and as able to do whatever His Father did. And then, Edward, He spoke of greater works than these, which He should still perform; works of greater *power*, in causing even the dead to hear His voice and live, as we shall have occasion to observe more than once in dwelling upon our Saviour's miracles;—works too of greater *authority*, which He should one day exercise in judging all men, even those poor deluded Jews, who were now presuming to condemn His actions, though so merciful, holy, and divine; for the Father hath given the Son authority to ex-

ecute judgment also. “Marvel not at this,” said our blessed Lord; “for the hour is coming in which *all* that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of man, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation.” Such were the clear and decided and awful words, in which our Lord declared to the Jews His divine nature and character; leaving them, you see, without excuse, if they should still shut their eyes to the truth. How could they refuse now to believe in Him? But they did: giving Him abundant reason to add, “ye will not come to me, that ye might have life!” yes, they obstinately refused all his gracious invitations, and despised His awful threatenings. They would not be persuaded either by John the Baptist, or by our Lord’s own miracles; nor would they believe the voice of God speaking from heaven, and declaring Jesus to be His own beloved Son. They closed their eyes also to those Scriptures which they acknowledged to be divine, and which testified plainly of Jesus. Even Moses, the great law-giver of Israel, he too wrote concerning our Lord. Had they really believed his writings, they would have believed our Saviour’s words. But prejudice blinded their hearts; nay more it filled them with rage; and would have led them on to murder their long promised Messiah, had not the providence of God for the present prevented such wickedness. How important then is it, my dear Edward, to have our minds always open to the truth, and never to suffer our passions, and least of all our uncharitable passions, to lead us astray from its holy and peaceful paths! and

above all, how careful should we ever be to follow with humility and thankfulness the teaching and example of Jesus Christ, who was so abundantly proved to be the Son of God! how simply, humbly, and entirely should we trust in that loving kindness and compassion, which He displayed when here on earth; and which He still feels for us in heaven!

See *John* v. 1—47; *Matt.* xii. 1—8;
Mark ii. 23—28; *Luke* vi. 1—5.

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY EVENING.

THE TWELVE APOSTLES.

M. From Jerusalem our Lord returned into Galilee to the town of Capernaum. There He again grievously offended the Pharisees, by healing a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath day, and that in the synagogue, before the congregation assembled for public worship. So greatly did this enrage these blind and prejudiced teachers of the people, that they consulted with some bitter enemies of their own, called the Herodians, about the best manner of putting Jesus to death.

E. Who were the Herodians, Mamma, and why were they and the Pharisees enemies to one another?

M. You have heard of several kings of the Jews called Herod, and you remember, I dare say, that these were kings appointed by the Roman emperor. Now, as they owed their thrones to Cæsar, the emperor of Rome, they were very anxious to get the Jewish people to pay tribute to Cæsar. This you

know the people in general disliked excessively, and were constantly endeavouring to avoid. Those of them who supported the claim of Herod, in this matter, were hated by the rest of the Jews, and were called Herodians; for such persons were naturally much about the court of Herod, and were thought to be favourites with him. The enmity between the two parties was very great; and there cannot be a stronger proof of the bitter hatred which the Pharisees had in their hearts against Christ, than that it should lead them thus to join with the Herodians, and consult with them about putting Him to death. But thus the wicked will often join hand in hand against the righteous; forgetting their own private quarrels, and allowing their hatred to one another to be swallowed up in their far greater hatred to the faithful servants of God! In vain was it, however, that the enemies of Christ sought to take away His life, one moment sooner than He chose to part with it. That precious life was to be a willing sacrifice: He would lay it down of Himself, when the appointed time was come, but not one hair of His head could be touched until He gave permission. He withdrew Himself now from the malice of these violent men; and leaving the town, He went to the more retired parts of the country, about the sea side. There is comfort in this little circumstance for all, who are at any time exposed to danger and suffering for the sake of their blessed Master, and whilst employed in His work. Not a hand, nor even a tongue can be raised against them, without the permission of their Saviour. Their lives and characters are precious in His sight, the very hairs of their head are numbered by Him; and the worst of their dangers or the fiercest of their

enemies, can have no power at all against them, unless it is given them by God.

I said that our Lord withdrew Himself on this occasion from the anger of the Pharisees, and their wicked plots against Him; He still, however, continued to employ Himself in instructing men and doing them good; thus leaving us an example of quiet activity in our different duties, and of meekness and prudence in avoiding as much as possible all contention, as well as all unnecessary danger. Such quiet activity in the path of duty is indeed the humbler and safer plan, and in general much more successful than a noisy and bustling course. It was thus that the Gospel made its way in the world. It was thus that our Lord advanced the cause of righteousness and truth, and enabled them to conquer the sins and follies of mankind.

Though our Saviour had left the city, the people continued to follow Him in great multitudes from all parts; that is to say, not only from Galilee, but from Tyre and Sidon on the north; from the country beyond Jordan on the east, from Jerusalem to the south, and even from Idumea.

E. How far was that, I wonder?

M. You may remember my mentioning Idumea, when we were reading the Old Testament, as one of the southern boundaries of the Holy Land. Now if we look on the map, and take the scale of miles which is given with it, we shall find that the nearest of the towns mentioned, which was Tyre, lay a considerable distance from Capernaum; not less than fifty miles in a straight line; the windings of the road, particularly among the mountains, would make it much more for the people to travel.

E. And Sidon, Mamma, was farther, and Jerusalem farther still; and Idumea more than twice as far; you see, I know this by measuring it with the compass.

M. Then how far do you make Idumea to have been from the neighbourhood of Capernaum, where our Lord was now teaching?

E. If Tyre was about fifty miles, I find that, by taking that distance with the compass towards Idumea, one step will bring me near to Mount Gerizim, and another as far as Hebron; so that Hebron was 100 miles from Capernaum, and Idumea was about 20 miles further. Why! what a distance the people travelled to come to Christ!

M. We may judge then how great must have been the fame of our Lord's wisdom and power, notwithstanding that He took so much care to teach and perform His miracles with all quietness, and to prevent the persons whom He healed from making Him known.

It was at this time that we find our Lord choosing from among His disciples *twelve* who should be called Apostles: that they might be with Him continually, as witnesses of what He did and taught; and that He might occasionally send them forth, both to preach, and also, by His power and with His authority, to heal sicknesses and cast out devils. Perhaps also the Saviour did this, partly because of the vast numbers who flocked to hear Him, that the Apostles might share the labour with Him; or perhaps to train them by His side for that great work which He intended them to perform hereafter, in preaching the Gospel of His kingdom to a world now lying in darkness. So

after spending a whole night in prayer to God, Jesus called to Him His disciples, and out of them He chose the following persons, whose names are given us in the tenth chapter of the Gospel by St. Matthew. There was Simon whom Christ had called Peter; and James the son of Zebedee; and John, the brother of James; and Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James, the son of Alpheus, and Thaddeus, and Simon the Canaanite. And then there was Judas Iscariot, who afterwards betrayed Christ.

E. But, Mamma, why did our Lord spend a whole night in prayer, before He chose His Apostles? Was it of great importance whom He chose?

M. It was indeed of vast importance what persons should be chosen to be Christ's witnesses to the world, and the first preachers of His holy religion, not only during His life, but still more after His departure. Most arduous and difficult would their duties be; and most distinguished their reward. Yet for this great and glorious office the persons chosen were not the wise and great men of the world. Four of them, Peter and Andrew, James and John, were fishermen; Matthew had indeed once been a rich publican, but at the command of Christ he had left all his gains to follow Jesus. James the son of Alpheus, and perhaps others besides him, as Simon and Jude, were taken from among the relations of our blessed Lord's mother; who, you know, was poor in this world, and of a humble station. Most unfit were such men by their worldly power, or by their outward advantages of education, to gain success in the world for the religion of Jesus. But it was not by worldly power that the Gospel was

to be spread ; it was not by their own talents, and knowledge, and wisdom, that they were to succeed as Apostles of the Lord. No ; they were plain, humble men ; totally unable of themselves to contend against the wisdom and power, and prejudices of the world. But Christ Himself would be with them, to give them both power and wisdom, such as their adversaries should not be able to withstand. Yes ; He would be with them, and with all the faithful ministers of His Gospel who should follow them in their labours, from generation to generation, even unto the end of the world. His Spirit should enable His Apostles to work miracles, and give them the knowledge of heavenly truth : and the more humble the instruments that were used, the more clearly would it appear to all, that their success was not from themselves, but from God.

We cannot wonder, however, that, before He chose the persons who were to go forth and proclaim His everlasting Gospel to “all the world,” our Lord should spend so long a season in prayer. He, who prayed always was still more earnest in prayer when something peculiarly important was to be done. And though we cannot understand all the reasons for what our Lord did, yet we may clearly see that He has here left us an example that we should follow His steps, and never enter upon any serious duty or business of life, without earnestly imploring God’s guidance and blessing.

See *Matt.* xii. 9—21 ; x. 2—4. *Mark* iii. 1—19.

Luke vi. 6—49.

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY EVENING.

THE BELIEVING CENTURION.

M. After choosing His Apostles, and performing many miracles among the people, our Lord delivered a sermon to His disciples very like that of which I have already given you some account, and which I told you was called the sermon on the mount. Christ was not above repeating often the same truths, and that sometimes in almost the same words, so as to fix them more deeply in the minds of His hearers, and to make His teaching more thoroughly understood.

Having finished His discourse to His disciples in the hearing of the people, He returned to Capernaum, but still without any rest from His works of mercy. Neither by sea, nor by land, neither in the field, nor in the city, did our blessed Lord cease from doing good. He was every where employed in acts of the greatest kindness. Nor was His compassion confined to the Jews only. In the city of Capernaum there was a Roman officer called a centurion, that is a captain of a hundred men, who had a servant at the point of death. Now this servant was dear to the centurion; he valued him very much and was grieved at his sufferings, which appear to have been unusually great. When therefore he heard of Jesus he thought at once of imploring His help. He would not venture however to go himself to Jesus; for he had a deep sense of his own unworthiness.

E. But, Mamma, he seems to have been a good man ; at any rate he was very kind to his servant.

M. He was indeed most compassionate to his sick servant ; not neglecting him in his distress ; not content even with procuring for him such relief as might be easily obtained, but seeking help for him at once from Christ the chief of all physicians. This, then, was no common kindness ; but this was not all that might be said of the Centurion. He was not only good to his own household, but also to all the people about him : so much so that the Jews considered him, though a Roman, to be a lover of their nation. He had even gone so far as to build a synagogue for them ; and, in the way of good works, he seems to have had more to pride himself upon, than most men have. By those around him he was indeed highly valued ; they spoke of him as one who was in every way worthy of kindness. But true goodness is always humble. So far was this centurion from thinking well of himself, so lowly was he in his own eyes, that he could not bring himself to approach so great and holy a person as Jesus ; no, not even with a humble request for a fellow creature. Perhaps he thought that, being a Roman, and therefore a Gentile, he might not come near our Lord. Such humility in such a person, was quite wonderful ; but it was fully equalled by his faith. With this deep sense of his own unworthiness, he had the most unbounded confidence in our Lord's power and mercy. Though he would not approach His holy presence himself, he persuaded some of his friends, who were among the chief people of the Jews, to go to Jesus for him, and entreat His help in behalf of his sick servant. Our blessed Lord most graciously re-

ceived the message. “I will come and heal him,”—was His immediate reply. Yes, He would condescend Himself to visit the sick bed of a poor servant ! Then, as if to show His readiness to receive all, and most of all those who in their own eyes were the least worthy, He proceeds at once to his house. But when He drew near to the house, the centurion sent again some of his private friends to Jesus, saying, “Lord, trouble not thyself; for I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof. Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed.”

E. Mamma, what astonishing faith he must have had to think that a word from Jesus was enough ! Did he know who Jesus was ?

M. He had heard, no doubt, of His fame and His miracles, which were known throughout all the land of Palestine, especially in and about Capernaum. But his faith was very remarkable: he seems to have had no doubt at all, but that the commands of Christ must be immediately obeyed. The remainder of his message to Christ gives us a beautiful proof of this. After entreating Jesus just to speak a word, and his servant should be healed, he says, “For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers; and I say to this man, go, and he goeth; and to another, come, and he cometh; and to my servant, do this, and he doeth it.” As a military officer, he was accustomed to render the most prompt obedience to those in authority over him, and to receive it also himself from the soldiers under his own command. Just like this, he thought, was the authority of Christ: “He too no doubt,” thought this humble and believ-

ing man, "has servants also under Him to do His will!" And was the centurion mistaken? Has He not armies of ministering spirits ever ready to fulfil His commandment, hearkening unto the voice of His word? Is He not the Lord of Hosts?

Believe it, my child, we can never depend too much on the mercy, nor trust too much to the power of our Lord Jesus Christ. Be assured, we can never ask too much from Him, if it be but with a humble sense of our own utter unworthiness, and a meek submission to His will. Does not our Lord teach us this continually? Does He not bid us learn it here, in His conduct to this centurion? When He had heard his message, He marvelled at him; He was filled with wonder and admiration at such faith in a sinful and weak human being; in a Roman centurion! "And he turned about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found such great faith, no, not in Israel. And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been sick." Thus he who had borne the praise of men so humbly, without being lifted up by it, was to receive public notice and praise from Christ, together with the cure which he had sought at His hands.

E. Yet I suppose this Centurion was a heathen too?

M. He had, no doubt, been a heathen; but, perhaps, from living among the Jews, and having an opportunity of knowing more of the truth, he had become a proselyte, or convert to their religion. His building a synagogue seems to show a pious, as well as a liberal spirit. But be this as it may, our Lord.

Himself declared, that He had “not found so great faith, no, not in Israel,” as in this gentile centurion.

The aged Simeon, you know, declared, when our Lord was as yet a child in his arms, that He should be a light to lighten the Gentiles; and I dare say you can tell me when this prophecy first began to be fulfilled.

E. Yes, Mamma; when the wise men from the east came to worship Jesus at Bethlehem.

M. And here we have another instance of the same kind; another pledge of the salvation of the Gentiles, through the Son of God. Not only from the East, but from the West also, many our Lord said *should* come, and many through the mercy of God *have* come, to sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. Gentiles from most parts of the world, to the east and west of Jerusalem, have already become God’s people, and heirs of His kingdom; while on the other hand, too many of the children of the kingdom, the Jews who were formerly heirs of the promises which God made to their fathers, have been cast out from the heavenly feast into outer darkness, to weep for their unbelief, and to gnash their teeth in bitter vexation at their grievous loss.

E. Are not we Gentiles, Mamma?

M. Yes, we are Gentiles; yet in one respect we stand now rather in the place of the Jews. For we are now by inheritance what they were in ancient times, “the children of the kingdom;” that is, being born in a Christian country, of Christian parents, and dedicated, as infants, at our baptism to the service of Christ, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, we have all the outward privi-

leges of the Church of God, and are placed within reach of its spiritual blessings, that inward and spiritual grace which they are intended to convey. But there is danger, lest we resemble the Jews in resting too much on these privileges, and thinking ourselves safe because we have the name of Christ named over us in our infancy ; just as they prided themselves on having Abraham for their father. But of how little value was this, if they did not become his spiritual children, that is, if they did not walk in the steps of the faith of their father Abraham. Indeed our Lord plainly told them that these privileges would only increase their condemnation, and that many far less favoured than themselves would rise up against them in the day of judgment to condemn them.

Let us think then not only of our advantages, which are many and great, but upon our danger too ; and let us not suffer our Gentile brethren, who are only just now passing from the darkness of ignorance to the light of the Gospel, to outstrip us in faith and holiness. There is no country in the world where Christian privileges abound more than in our own ; none where the Scriptures are spread more freely ; where the Sacraments are more duly administered, or the truth of the Gospel more fully and faithfully taught. In no country is there a form of prayer more pure, more spiritual, more scriptural, than that with which God is worshipped in our Churches ; I mean that form of devotion which is contained in our Prayer Book, Edward, and which is called the Liturgy of the Church of England. It is, indeed, a blessing to be born of Christian parents, and that in our favoured land ; to be educated in such a Church ;

thus to be “led into the path of peace, and prepared to inhabit hereafter one of the many mansions of your Father’s house in heaven.” I wish you from your childhood to feel how greatly God has blessed you ; to value your privileges, and by God’s grace to make a good use of them : lest they should be taken away from you, in some degree perhaps in this world, or you should be called to answer hereafter for neglecting them. It is a humble sense of our own unworthiness, and a full confidence in the mercy and power of Christ our Saviour which makes the safe Christian, and not the abundance of our privileges.

The Roman Centurion has left us, in more points than one, a very profitable example. He was a kind master, a good neighbour, a promoter of religion, seeking the peace and prosperity of those among whom he lived ; and with all these excellent qualities, which too often lead people to feel pleased with themselves, he was deeply humble. And more, far more, than all the rest, he was a simple and sincere believer in Jesus Christ. Vain would have been all the rest, without this faith in the Son of God !

We have talked long, and I will only make one or two observations more. Religion is often considered to be almost impossible in a military life. Yet it is remarkable how many pious *soldiers* we read of in the Bible. And observe how this Gentile captain turns his very calling as a soldier into a lesson of piety ; learning from it how he was to obey the Lord of hosts. The fact is, a man may be religious in every situation of life. A humble and believing heart is the great requisite ; and the Spirit of God can give that in the bustle of the camp, as well as

in the stillness of the cloister. See too in this story that those who humble themselves shall be exalted. "I am not worthy," says the centurion concerning himself. "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel," says the Saviour concerning the centurion.

See *Matt.* viii. 5—13. *Luke* vii. 1—10.

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY EVENING.

THE WIDOW OF NAIN.

E. I wonder what you are going to talk to me about to-night, Mamma? I have been thinking that you may not be able perhaps to tell me any thing quite so interesting, as what we had last Sunday evening. I did like that account of the good centurion so very much.

M. I do not wonder at that: it was a very striking story, and you certainly must not always expect to be equally pleased with the subject of our conversation. Every part of our blessed Lord's history is deeply important and profitable; every portion of it contains some valuable lesson; something that is calculated to improve, or correct, or refresh our hearts. Nor do I think that you will ever have cause to complain that any hour of the time we may spend in tracing his course of mercy, when He was here on earth, was long or dull to you. At the same time there are some parts of His holy life which will be more interesting to all of us than others, and especially to the young. I am always glad when I come to them, and always ready to indulge you by dwelling as long as possible

on these pleasant spots; the more so, because I see that you are ready to go with me wherever I lead you, and are willing to give your mind to the more solemn and difficult parts of our subject, as well as to the more delightful. I say this because you will soon have to listen to, and to try to understand, some of our blessed Lord's instructions and conversations with His disciples, as well as to wonder with them at His mighty works: not that we are to be thus engaged to-night, for it so happens that we come this evening to a miracle in some respects more remarkable than any you have yet met with in our Saviour's ministry; and a story more affecting than any I have had to relate since we began the Gospel history.

E. One that I shall like better, Mamma, than the woman of Samaria, or the nobleman, who went so far to bring Christ to heal his child? Pray begin, for I long to hear it.

M. We come to-night to that account of the widow of Nain, which is given us in a few and simple, but beautiful and touching words, in the Gospel of St. Luke. For from Capernaum our Lord went to Nain, a little city not far from Mount Tabor. Do you remember any part of the story?

E. I think I do, a little of it, Mamma:—did He not meet a funeral, just as He was going into the city?

M. Yes, He did; for scenes of sorrow and death were as common then as they are now. It was a melancholy sight, this funeral procession; a great number of sorrowing friends accompanied it, as it came through the gates of the city: for it was a case of unusual dis-

tress, and seems to have called forth an unusual degree of pity.

We soon learn the reason, "the dead man carried out was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow;" and there she walked—the chief mourner in that melancholy train! A poor lonely, desolate widow. Amidst all the sorrows that may be found in this world of trouble, there are none, perhaps, so great as this. "A widow and desolate!" there are no words in the language of men to express greater misery than these. And this poor mourner was not only a widow, but a widowed mother, burying her only child. For his father she had probably wept long before, as those weep who lose all that they love best on earth; and though this dear and only son could not in any degree make up that loss, yet he had been, no doubt, a great comfort to her broken heart. Something, for which she might still bear, and even wish to live, was left to her whilst he remained; something that cheered her home; something that she might love, and that would love her again. No doubt she had watched over his childhood and youth with that tenderness and affection which mothers only can feel; and he had grown up by her side in obedience and love; and now was old enough to repay her care, and to comfort and help her all the rest of her life. Her home would be no longer desolate; she had again a companion and a friend; again an arm to which she could cling firmly and fondly; on which she might lean even to the grave. Such, it is most likely, had been the thoughts and feelings of this poor woman, for human hearts have been much the same in all ages of the world:

God has fashioned them all alike; and what we should feel and suffer in such circumstances ourselves, was most probably felt and suffered by the widow of Nain.

What then must the poor mother have felt, as she herself followed the bier on which her cherished child was laid. She had watched over his sick bed; she had hoped and prayed that he might be spared to her, but in vain; with her own hands she had closed his eyes; and now she would take him herself, and place him in his last earthly home. No strange hands should make his bed for him in the grave: no; a little while longer she would bear up, that she might lay his loved form safely there. How she should return again, and enter once more her lonely home, perhaps she had never thought: her only care had been to stay with her lost child to the very last. What a picture of human misery is here—human misery beyond the reach of human help.

E. But not beyond the help of Christ?

M. No, my child; neither then nor now is there any sorrow too great for Him to heal. He came to bind up the broken hearted; He did bind them up, when He was here on earth, and He can as easily bind them up now. A word or a look from Him can do more than the words, or looks, or tears of ten thousand friends. Let us see how the poor widow was taught this. She little thought, as she left the gates of the city, to come back in a little while without her child, that there was One approaching, not only willing to sympathise in her grief, but able to remove it too. Our blessed Lord was, at this very moment coming nigh to the gate of the city. “Christ, the God of comfort, met her, pitied her, relieved her.” When

He saw the afflicted mother, He had compassion on her and said, "Weep not."

E. But, Mamma, how could she help weeping? I am almost afraid she would think it unkind of Jesus to tell her to dry her tears!

M. A hard, and indeed a harsh command, Edward, had it been given by any one else. When the world tells us not to weep in the midst of such troubles as these, their words only make our grief more bitter, and seem to mock at our woe. The Bible understands comforting much better than this; for it says, "Weep with them that weep." But coming from Jesus, the Consolation of Israel, the words *Weep not* were full of healing. Uttered by Him, what were they but a promise of relief from sorrow? And perhaps they were even so understood by the widow of Nain, if at least she had heard of Jesus, and knew that it was He who was now approaching.

E. But, Mamma, I do not think she could have heard of Jesus restoring any one to life. I know you have not told me yet of His bringing back any body from the grave.

M. No, the people had known Him to heal the sick, and perform many other wonderful works; but they had never yet beheld Him raising the dead. So that, even if the poor childless widow had seen our Lord before when "he went about all Galilee," and had beheld Him healing all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease among the people, still she might easily have thought her grief beyond His cure. Her son was not now lying on his bed of sickness, but on his funeral bier: while there is life there is hope; but death puts an end to all hope as far as this world is

concerned. Not however when the Lord Himself interferes; and He it was who said to this poor woman “Weep not.” He it was who came and touched the bier, and stopped that mournful procession.

E. And she does not even seem to have asked His pity, Mamma.

M. Perhaps, absorbed in her grief, she had not noticed His approach, nor observed the crowds that had attended Him, now mingling with the sad multitude that followed her. At any rate the Saviour did not wait for that heart-rending prayer that would most likely have burst from her lips, had she known who was near, and how able He was to help her. No; her deep, silent, and hopeless sorrow spoke more to His heart than the most moving words could have done. He saw her, and had compassion on her. Yes; Christ saw her, though she did not notice Him; for often “no tears or prayers of ours can move Him half so much, as our afflictions and His own compassion.” He knows our souls in all their adversities. Blessed and encouraging thought! even when we are almost too miserable to pour out our complaint before Him, and bring before Him our troubles, He sees our sorrows, and often is approaching to comfort us before we have even asked His help. But let us see what He did now for the poor widow.

E. You said, Mamma, that our Lord approached that sorrowful party.

M. How great must have been the anxiety at this moment, both of the multitude that followed our Lord, and of that which had accompanied the funeral! But above all how intense must have been the feeling of the desolate mother! How must her heart have

throbbed under its mingled sensations of expectation, and hope and fear! The inclination to hope every thing, the dread of hoping too much, the probability of disappointment. Surely the interest with which she watched every movement of our Saviour, must have amounted well nigh to agony.

E. I hope it did not last long?

M. Her suspense must have been soon over: but few moments could have passed from the time of his saying to her, "Weep not," before she heard that same voice exclaim, "Young man, I say unto you, arise." What must have been the surprise of all at hearing such words as these! What their wonder and astonishment on finding the call no sooner given than obeyed! Perhaps, many an unbelieving heart had thought, "Alas! you may call for ever; but he cannot hear:" for they knew not yet that the hour was come, when "the dead should hear the voice of the Son of man," and not only hear, but "live." But so it was; "he that was dead, sat up and began to speak." What must have been the feelings of the mother, when she heard that voice again, and its loved tones thrilled once more through her soul, as Jesus delivered to her her son again, alive and in perfect health! Her happiness must indeed have been far greater than any words of hers or ours could describe. Even the Scripture does not attempt to tell us what she felt. Perhaps, it was well for her, that her joy was moderated by a wholesome and holy fear.

It is, indeed remarkable, that fear seems to have been the prevailing effect of this miracle upon all who witnessed it. Their hearts sunk within them at the display of so much power, although exerted in a work

of mercy. How dreadful must that same power, the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, be, when put forth to punish, if it was thus awful even in giving relief; and what a blessed reflection it is to all who will really make the Son of God their hope, that He is not more powerful than He is compassionate !

E. I wonder, Mamma, whether the young man liked to come back to this world again !

M. That would be difficult for us to say. If safe and happy in a better world than this, it would scarcely have been a blessing to him, as far as we can see; though whatever Christ wills for us, is better, we may be sure, than any thing we should choose for ourselves. We may imagine too that, for his mother's sake, and at his Saviour's will, this young man might be content to wear the load of life for a little while again. The kindness, however, was chiefly in this case to the mother: what was her gain, must, in some degree, have been his loss, but all right as so arranged by Christ.

I think, however, that we may be permitted to rejoice, that we shall not pass twice through the gates of death; that when once we have entered into rest, we shall not return to labour any more: the peaceful haven once gained, we shall never again be tossed on the waves of this troublesome world. When we fall asleep in Jesus, we shall wake no more until the general resurrection.

And as a proof that we shall then arise out of our graves, how valuable is the account of this miracle ! I told you that it was more remarkable than any which had been recorded before; perhaps you can now tell

me in what respect it stands out in a manner above the rest.

E. Why, Mamma, I should think it required more power to make the dead live, than to heal the sick.

M. To raise the dead is certainly more out of the common course of things, and therefore a more striking proof of our Lord's divine nature ; though it does not seem that any power less than divine, could have wrought any one of our Lord's miracles. But to us the raising of the dead is certainly more remarkable than the healing of the sick, agreeably to what our Lord himself had told the people at Jerusalem, when he said to them : " The Father loveth the Son and showeth him all that himself doeth : and he will show him greater works than these, that ye may marvel. For as the Father raiseth up the dead and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth whom he will." The people, our Lord said, would " marvel," and great accordingly was the effect produced by this miracle at Nain. The people began to glorify God, and to speak of Jesus as a great prophet, and to say that God had at length visited his people ; looking now, perhaps, upon our Lord, in his true character, as the promised Messiah.

There is another circumstance in this miracle, which we should not fail to notice ; and that is its *publicity*. You may have observed, that on some occasions, when our Lord performed a miracle, he expressly commanded the person whom he had cured to be silent about it. We are not always told why he did this. No doubt there were some wise reasons for such a command. But, in the present instance, it was

the will of Christ that the raising of the widow's son should be made very public. There were, as we have seen, a great number of persons present. The miracle in fact concerned them, and does still concern us, almost as much as it did the widow. Whether we consider it as a proof that Jesus had come from God, or as an assurance of the resurrection, for which we all look hereafter, they were fully as much interested in it as she was. And, accordingly, we find that this was the effect partly produced upon the multitude. "God," they said, "had visited his people."

Let this miracle then convince us of our Saviour's power over death. He is called in Scripture, He does, indeed, call Himself, the resurrection and the life; and He promises "to those who believe in him," that He will raise them up at the last day to life eternal.

E. Mamma, I was just thinking of the last sentence in the Apostles' Creed, where we say, you know, that we "believe in the resurrection of the body," and after that, "in the life everlasting." I feel as if I should always say that from my very heart now.

M. I trust you will, and have your share in it hereafter; for there certainly is that endless life after death for those whose sins have been forgiven, and hearts renewed through Jesus Christ. This is indeed the great hope of our blessed religion; one, in which it is very important to be clearly and firmly established. Had our Lord, indeed, only assured us of it, it would have been enough. But He has graciously gone further; He has brought these great and glorious truths almost before our senses, and has given

us actual proofs of His power to raise the dead, such as this which took place at the city of Nain. And, in this extraordinary miracle, His compassion to the poor widow was not greater than to us all. She, indeed, was delivered from present grief, and could rejoice once more in the society of her son. But, after all, this was a blessing only for a little while ; and even to the widow and her son this world would still be full of trouble. Ere long they must part again, one of them must once more join the melancholy funeral procession and lay the other in the grave.

But the resurrection of which we are now speaking, as about to take place at the great day, will not be at all like this. It will not be a return for a few short years to bodies of sin and death, and a world of disappointment and trouble. That is not the Christian's hope. When he wakes up at the morning of the resurrection, he will not begin a short life of sorrow and sin, but a life of unsullied righteousness, of unalloyed bliss, of endless duration. "When Christ who is our life shall appear, then we shall appear with Him in glory," and partake with Him in an existence as lasting as it will be happy. This is the mercy which the Son of God has shown to all who will place their hope in Him, and purify themselves as He is pure, that they may hereafter be glorious, as He is glorious, and immortal, as He is immortal. The resurrections recorded in the Gospels should lead us to think of and to long after this resurrection, to seek earnestly to have our share in it, and to confirm our hope of enjoying it through Christ Jesus our Saviour. For if we be raised now, by His Holy Spirit, from sin and folly, which are as the grave of our hopes, to a life of righteousness, we shall as-

surely be raised hereafter “from death to life, from dust to glory.”

See *Luke* vii. 1—16.

TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY EVENING.

THE MESSENGERS OF JOHN.

M. I told you at the close of our last conversation, Edward, how much the restoration of the widow's son had astonished all the people; and how they “glorified God saying, that a great prophet was risen up among them; and that God had visited his people.”

E. So far they were right, Mamma; for, you know, Jesus was that great prophet whom Moses had promised them.

M. They were right indeed, as far as they went; but, you see, their minds were still so blinded, that they could not see how much more than a Prophet they had among them. Not even such a miracle, as that which they had just seen, could convince them, that the Son of God, their promised Messiah, stood before them. The news, however, of what Christ had done, spread far and wide through all Judea and through all the region round about, and penetrated at last even the walls of that sad prison, where John the Baptist was confined; for the disciples of John told him all these things. And when John heard of the works of Christ, he called unto him two of his disciples, and sent them to Jesus, saying, “Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?”

E. Mamma, I am surprised at that; for I thought

John had plainly pointed out our Lord as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world: therefore, you know, he must have believed Him to be the Messiah that should come.

M. There can be no doubt that John himself believed in Christ; it must, therefore, have been merely to satisfy the minds of his disciples, that he sent them to Jesus with such a message. They were attached to their own master, John, and were unwilling, most probably, to acknowledge any greater than himself: and therefore he sent them to Christ, in the hope that, hearing His heavenly doctrine and seeing His extraordinary miracles, they might be convinced that He was the Son of God.

E. And what did our Lord say to them?

M. At the time that they came He was curing many of their infirmities, and plagues, and evil spirits; and unto many that were blind He gave sight. "And He answered and said unto John's disciples, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see; the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed; the deaf hear; the dead are raised; to the poor the gospel is preached: and blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me." Our Lord could not have declared more plainly that He was indeed the Christ. These were the very works which their own prophets had foretold the Messiah should perform; especially, you know, the prophet Isaiah. I dare say you can tell me his exact words.

E. Yes, in the thirty-fifth chapter he says, "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing."

And again, in the twenty-ninth chapter, “In that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eye of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness. The meek also shall increase their joy in the Lord, and the poor among the people shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel:” just as the poor widow rejoiced when she got her son back again ! How true, Mamma, was all that the prophets said of Christ !

M. And it was to those works of His, which so exactly fulfilled their words, that our Lord drew the attention of John’s disciples, in order to remove their doubts ; pronouncing at the same time a blessing on those, who, laying aside all their prejudices, should allow themselves to be convinced, and accept Him as their Lord and Saviour. Well indeed, after such an appeal, might our Saviour add : “Blessed is he who-soever shall not be offended in me.” To John himself, amidst all the afflictions of his prison-house, it must have been a great consolation and joy to receive these tidings of the increasing glory of that Saviour, on whom his best hopes rested. He might now, like Simeon, depart in peace, whenever, and by whatever death, it should please God to call him away : if his eyes had not seen, his ears had fully heard the salvation of God.

When the disciples of John had returned, Jesus began to declare the praise of John before all the people, telling them very plainly that this was he of whom the prophet had spoken so clearly, saying, “Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.” You remember, I am sure, how great an interest the people had felt about John, before he was cast into prison ?

E. Yes, you know, they flocked in multitudes into the wilderness to see him.

M. And now our Saviour asks them, what it was that drew them there in such numbers. “What went ye out into the wilderness to see?” Something no doubt important and extraordinary.

Was it to see the reeds on the banks of Jordan waving in the wind? No; it was not for this that the whole people poured forth into the desert in such crowds. John was no waving reed, tossed to and fro, like a weak and foolish person, with every wind of vain doctrine;—turning this way or that, now teaching one thing, and now another, just as the people wished. He was more like the cedars of Lebanon, or the oaks of Bashan, firm amidst the tempest. Often indeed are the multitude drawn together by trifles light as a waving reed, but it was not so now.

What was it then? Some courtly pageant, such as the people like to gaze upon; a man clothed in rich and gorgeous apparel, on his way to a luxuriant banquet? Such sights are not uncommon, and always attract plenty of beholders.

E. But I am sure that was not the case now, Mamma; for John’s clothing was a rough coat of camel’s hair, bound with a leather girdle, and he had no rich feasts to partake of, but only locusts and wild honey.

M. Exactly so; and it was the simplicity, nay more, the self-denial and austerity, which marked him, not the splendour of his appearance, that attracted general notice.

Was he then, asks our Saviour, a Prophet? For more than four hundred years the voice of a pro-

phet had not been heard in Judea. God had ceased to speak to His people by Prophets, since the time of Malachi. Yes; John was a prophet, but he was still more. He was the subject of prophecy; that Elijah, of whom the last of the prophets had spoken. His office was of a more excellent kind than theirs; and poor as he seemed, and hard as was his outward lot, he was the most highly honoured of all the men that had yet appeared, before the coming of our Saviour.

Even Noah and Moses, David and Daniel, were lower in spiritual rank than John. It is true they all spoke of Christ; but how darkly and indistinctly compared with him! These great patriarchs and prophets reflected indeed the beams of the Sun of righteousness, but it was from a great distance. John was far nearer to the "Light of the world," and shone with a brighter and steadier blaze; though in this respect, even John was inferior to the teachers who were soon to arise in the Christian Church, the least of whom should be enabled, more clearly and more fully far than John, to speak concerning Christ the Saviour of the world.

And remember that Christ has Himself pronounced a blessing on those, who instead of being offended at Him and His doctrines, as the Jews were, believe in Him with all their hearts, placing their hopes of salvation in Him, and Him alone. "Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me." May this gracious promise sink deep into our hearts! Let us not put it from us, as the Pharisees and many others did. Some indeed there were who had been roused by the preaching first of John, and then of Christ, to a strong sense of their sins, and showed such earnestness to save their souls, that our

Lord describes them as taking the kingdom of Heaven almost by force, and rushing in, with a kind of holy violence, at the gates which John had begun to unlock, and which Christ was opening wide for their escape from sin. Happy few ! Who can be too earnest in such a matter ? But this was far from being the case with all. The people, for the most part, continued to sit at their ease, in a sort of sullen indifference, neither heeding the warnings of the Baptist, nor yet persuaded by the gracious invitations of the Saviour Himself. Our Lord compares them to moody children, who would neither mourn when they heard the sound of the funeral dirge, nor dance to the cheerful pipe.

E. I think I know, from what you have just said, what Jesus meant. Was it not that they would neither sorrow for their sins at the preaching of John, nor rejoice in the glad tidings of salvation ?

M. Exactly ; and what perverseness did this show ! But, alas ! the same perverseness may be seen still. Notwithstanding all God's wise and gracious methods with us, how hard is it to gain our attention to the things that belong to our peace ! The very wisest in human wisdom are often fools here. The most favoured, the least inclined to attend to God's holy word. May we have grace to avoid their sad example ! may we not be like the wayward children in the market-place ; but, like obedient and tractable children, may we mourn for our sins, when God calls us to repentance, and rejoice in His promises when Christ preaches forgiveness. Then shall we avoid those heavy judgments which our Lord declares against such, immediately after He had pronounced His blessing on those who should not be offended in Him. For no sooner has the sacred

historian informed us of our Lord's interview with John's disciples, than He goes on to record, that Jesus began then to upbraid the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done, because they repented not: saying, "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon, at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou Capernaum, which art exalted unto Heaven, shall be brought down to Hell; for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom, in the day of Judgment, than for thee." Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, were the places where our Lord had been daily preaching, and the places where most of His miracles were performed; they not only heard, as the other cities did, but saw for themselves, and yet they repented not; and therefore it should be better hereafter for the heathen cities of Tyre and Sidon, and even for the abominable Sodom, than for them. Greater had been their advantages, and therefore greater would be their condemnation. We learn an awful lesson here, Edward; even this, that God will reckon with us hereafter according to the opportunities we have had here on earth of knowing and loving Him. "To whom much is given, of him will much be required." It is a solemn and a painful thought; may God make it profitable to our salvation!

But how strangely do words of anger sound from

the lips of Jesus ! No sooner has He spoken of judgment, than He hastens back again to mercy ; no sooner declared threatenings, than He proceeds to the most encouraging invitations ! He who has just pronounced those awful ‘ Woes,’ now speaks again the sweetest promises. He turns once more to the people, and says, “ Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me ; for I am meek and lowly of heart ; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

You see the blessed Jesus desires not to drive any one away from Him. He invites all who are weary with the load of their sorrows, or with the yoke of their sins, to come unto Him and find rest. And who that knows any thing of his own heart, is not weary of *himself*? Who that knows any thing of his own sins, does not feel them to be indeed “ a sore burden, too heavy for him to bear ?” Who that knows any thing of the sorrows of the world, is not often wearied with them? What a mercy is it, then, to find such a precious invitation as this in our Bibles ! to see that we are not called upon to bear this burden alone ! that Christ offers to take it from us, and to give us instead the easy yoke and light burden of His commandments ; and that He will Himself teach us how to bear it ! “ Take my yoke upon you, and *learn* of me ;” I will teach you both to obey my commandments and to submit to my will ; and, in doing so, you shall find rest unto your souls. You shall no longer be tossed about with the tempest of your own wicked passions and evil inclinations ; but you shall wear my yoke ; you shall keep my laws, which, though they

may seem difficult at first shall become easy and more easy every day, until they make you happy here, and fit you for eternal rest in heaven.

E. Dear Mamma, I have always been very fond of those beautiful words; and from this time I shall love them more, since you have made me to understand them better. Would you mind going back now for a moment? I want to ask you whether Tyre and Sidon were particularly wicked cities; for though I remember Sodom and Gomorrah very well, I do not recollect ever hearing any thing particular of Tyre and Sidon.

M. I am always glad to give you any information that I can. These places, on the coast of the Mediterranean, were remarkable for their luxury, pride, and contempt of all religion; as we learn from several parts of Scripture, particularly from the twenty-third chapter of the prophet Isaiah and the twenty-eighth of Ezekiel. We will read them together.

See *Matt.* xi. 2—30. *Luke* vii. 17—35.



TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY EVENING.

THE FEET OF JESUS WASHED WITH TEARS.

M. Our Lord seems to have made some stay at Nain, the city to which He was going, you know, when He met the funeral procession, and restored to the poor widow her only son! Whilst He was there, one of the Pharisees invited Him to eat with him at his own house; nor did Jesus refuse, but went with him and sat down to meat. “And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner,” that is, a great and

grievous sinner, “when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.”

E. I cannot see how she could stand behind our Lord and wash His feet, whilst He was sitting at dinner?

M. Do you not remember the account given in one of your books of the manner in which the Jews and other nations formerly took their meals?

E. Oh! yes; I recollect they did not sit as we do, but reclined upon couches: and they leant quite across these, so that the head of one was nearly on the bosom of the person next above him; whilst his feet were stretched out and hung over the couch behind. I see now how the woman could wash our Saviour’s feet, even whilst He sat at meat. But go on, dear Mamma; I am so sorry for her; I am afraid she must have been very wicked; but I am glad she was so unhappy about it, and that she came to Jesus, for that, you know, was the best thing she could do.

M. The best thing indeed that any can do, when they feel their own sinfulness, is to go to Jesus; and the greater their guilt, the greater is their need of His blood to wash away their sins. The Bible tells us that “the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin;” and for fear any unhappy persons, who have been very wicked, should think theirs are too great to be forgiven, it says in another place: “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; and though they be red like crimson, they shall be as

wool." Blessed words ! perhaps this poor woman had heard them, for they are in the Old Testament. At any rate the Spirit of God, who had caused those words to be written, had led her to see her sins, as well as to repent deeply and bitterly of them, and had guided her to the feet of the only being who could put away her sin, remove her guilt, and give her pardon and peace ! Those who know any thing of the evil propensities of their own hearts, and feel that, if they have not fallen into open and grievous offences, it is because of God's mercy in preserving them, and not from their own goodness ;—such persons, Edward, will rejoice, when they see wicked people, who have wandered far away from Christ, brought back to His feet. And their Saviour's mercy, in receiving such miserable sinners, will only make them love Him so much the more. They will not be envious of His kindness, nor inclined to complain because His boundless love is open to all. No ; they will remember what He has also done for themselves ! How much He has forgiven ; how much He has borne with them ! they will think of their own continual wanderings from Him, in thought, word, and deed ; though they may not have offended so openly and sadly as some others, they will remember, that, if He were extreme to mark what is done amiss, then would they also be condemned. For the hearts of all are by nature alike ; even in regard to practice, there is not one that can say, " I have not sinned." But the Pharisee (and we have seen before that the Pharisees were very righteous in their own eyes) was quite astonished that our Lord should allow a person of bad character to approach Him in this manner. He had no pity for her

himself, and he could not understand how her misery should touch the heart of Christ; her streaming eyes, her bended body, the reverence and affection with which she approached our Saviour, were all lost on the hard-hearted and self-righteous Pharisee. He knew nothing himself of the tears of penitence, or of that love and value for a Saviour which none but sinners could feel! Had he been in our Lord's place, he would not have allowed himself to be touched by such unholy hands, but would have driven this broken-hearted sinner away from his feet. And as it was, he took it for granted in his own mind, that this man could be no prophet; for that "if he had been, he would have known who, and what manner of woman, this was that touched him," and would, no doubt, have sent her away.

E. But Jesus would not have done so, I am sure. Besides, Mamma, He must have known what sort of a person this was.

M. Yes, Edward; He knew all her sins, and all her sorrow too; and He knew the value of that faith, which could bring such a sinner to His feet with a hope of finding pardon there. He knew too all her love for Him; that love, which made her bathe His feet with her tears, and wipe them with the hairs of her head, and then anoint them with the most precious ointment her hands could procure. He saw all this, and graciously allowed such expression of her feelings—such relief of her bursting heart. Nor were the thoughts of the woman only known to Christ; He was also aware what was passing in the mind of the Pharisee, and replied aloud to his inmost heart. For "Jesus answering said unto Him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master,

say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors; the one owed five hundred pence; and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he to whom he forgave most. He said unto him, thou hast rightly judged."

E. I think I can tell what Jesus meant by this little story, Mamma. The debtor who owed five hundred pence must have been this poor woman, who had offended our Lord by her sins so very much. And the debtor who owed so very little, compared with her, must have been the Pharisee.

M. Just so; and you see he is described by our Lord as needing pardon too, though he knew it not. He also had a debt, and although it might be smaller than the other debt, yet as he had nothing to pay, he too must have been condemned to punishment. Thus, you see, the Pharisee was taught, and we are taught, that, in God's sight, all are sinners, and that whether our debt be greater or smaller, whether our sins be more or fewer, it is still utterly impossible for any one of us to clear our debt ourselves. Those who owe the least stand in need of mercy and forgiveness. He frankly forgave them both. "To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgiveness although we have rebelled against him." Thus, you see, our Lord graciously explained to the proud Pharisee what had caused him so much wonder, His allowing a sinful woman like this to approach His sacred person. He then proceeded to point out to him that, if her debt had been by far the greatest, so had her love exceeded his beyond all degree. "Jesus turned to the woman,

who had stood all this time behind Him weeping, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman ? I entered into thy house, thou gavest me no water for my feet ; but she hath washed my feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. My head with oil *thou* didst not anoint, but this woman hath anointed my *feet* with ointment. Thou gavest me no kiss, but this woman, since the time I came in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet. Therefore I say unto you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven her, for she loved much ; but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little."

E. You see, Mamma, Jesus did know that this woman was a sinner ; for He says, "her sins, which are many, are forgiven."

M. Yes ; He is, you know, the Saviour of sinners : He came into the world expressly to seek and to save that which was lost in sin. Surely it would not have become Him to refuse to receive sinners ; especially one who came to Him weeping bitterly for her past offences, yea washing His feet with her tears, and unable to do enough to show her repentance, or her grateful love to Christ for coming to save such as she was. By men indeed she was regarded as an outcast from society ; but the Son of God was ready to receive and restore even her ; to pardon her guilt to heal her soul ; and to bring her back again into the way of peace, and to the hope of happiness.

E. But, Mamma, is it not wrong to keep company with wicked people ? I thought we ought to avoid all bad persons.

M. You are quite right : *we* ought to do so, Edward. Our Lord did many things in which we can-

not imitate Him; and this may be one. He was, as we have just observed, the Saviour of sinners; and therefore sought them out, that He might save them. He was the Physician of our souls; and therefore refused not to receive the spiritually sick, however bad their case might be.

Again, He was too holy to be in danger from any society, into which His mercy might lead Him; and His character was too pure to suffer from the disrepute of those amongst whom He moved. But this is not our case; and least of all is it the case of young persons. They would be in great danger of suffering from the example and conversation of bad people, if they were to venture to mix with them: and the world too would judge of them by the society in which they were found. Besides, if those who openly despise and break God's laws, were allowed to mix with the virtuous, there would be no distinction of right and wrong, and the whole world would soon become like themselves. Still, my dear Edward, our merciful religion does not shut such persons out from all hope. Far from it! Christ has His ministers in the world, whose business it is to be, in their Master's name and from Him, physicians of men's souls, as He was when on earth, as He is still though now in heaven. It is the duty of these, the shepherds of Christ's flock, to search out even the worst, and to speak to them of forgiveness through the Son of God. What you and I could not do with propriety, a grave and holy clergyman, set apart expressly to this work, is bound to do; for he is sent by Christ Himself to bind up the broken-hearted, to turn the sinner from the error of his way. He may not refuse the worst of

men when they come to learn from him the way of peace, but will rejoice in every opportunity of declaring to them that, in Christ, there is mercy with God for every one who repents and really looks to Him for salvation: and that He will indeed abundantly pardon all who believe in Him, and desire, through His grace, to forsake their sins.

And often, my dear child, some of those unhappy people, who have been led into grievous sins, receive the glad tidings of the Gospel and its precious promises of pardon more readily, and far more thankfully, than others, who, though very sinful (as indeed all are) in the sight of God, yet have lived with greater credit among men.

E. Yes, Mamma; for how much more the woman we have been talking about loved our Saviour than the proud Pharisee did!

M. Indeed she did; for observe how much reverence and love and gratitude she shewed towards Christ; how cold, and even neglectful, was the manner in which Simon had received Him! Simon gave Him no water for His feet, though it was the common custom of the country, to offer this refreshment to visitors. Nor did Simon salute Him, as was the manner in those days, with a kiss of friendship; nor anoint His head with reviving oil: whilst for water the woman had supplied her tears, and did not cease to kiss His feet; and instead of the oil, with which it was usual to anoint the head of the guest, she brought a rich ointment, and with that anointed, not the head, but the feet of our Lord. And from all this what must we conclude? What is the conclusion which our Lord Himself drew? surely it was one which

might have made Simon tremble, when he heard Jesus say, that, where there was so little love, there could not have been much forgiveness.

It is possible indeed that Simon, being a Pharisee, might be inclined to thank God that he was not like other men, much less like this woman; and therefore perhaps he did not think that he much needed forgiveness. But this only made his case the worse. For all men are sinful before God; all need repentance; all require pardon; all would be for ever lost without a Saviour; and not to know this, is to be in the case of a sick man who thinks himself well, filled with a sore disease, yet supposing he has no need of the physician. Had Simon judged of himself aright, he would have thought no respect too great for the Saviour of sinners, no love too costly or too devoted towards one, who could blot out all his iniquities. He would have seen too, that whatever the woman of Nain might once have been, she was now an example for his imitation; and instead of despising her, and being offended with our Lord's conduct towards her, He would have looked at both with wonder and admiration—wonder, at her overflowing sorrow, her deep humility, her fervent love; and oh! what wonder and admiration at the Saviour's mercy and the exceeding riches of His grace! Let us stop for a moment and re-consider both.

See how tenderly the Lord Jesus treated this penitent sinner, whom Simon would have driven away with disdain; how minutely He notices each little particular in her conduct towards Him; the abundant tears with which she had bathed His feet; the deep reverence, and self-abasement, with which she had

employed her own hair in wiping them; the love which had led her, without ceasing, to press them to her lips. Nothing was overlooked by Jesus. The least circumstance, which proved that, though once a wretched wanderer, she had now come back to His fold, was precious in His sight: for He is the good Shepherd, who loves all His sheep, and cannot bear that one of them should perish.

Whilst we dwell with delight on this fresh instance of our Lord's goodness, let us also try to take a lesson of love and gratitude, of reverence and humility, of penitence and faith, from her whose story has interested us so much. Hers was no common instance of sorrow for sin. See how it humbled her to the dust. She did not presume to present herself *before* our blessed Lord; she did not venture to speak one word, to offer one excuse for herself, or to ask one favour at His hands. To stand behind Him in the humblest posture; to be allowed, in some faint degree, to show her sorrow for her past offences, and her exceeding love for Him, whom she believed to be able and willing to blot them out—this was enough for her. And, in doing this, what extraordinary affection, and what extraordinary faith did she show! She must have believed that her Saviour loved her, and would forgive her all that she had done, or she would never have felt such exceeding love to Him; she would never have mourned so deeply over her own transgressions. Hers was a real and living faith, for it worked by love; it produced hearty sorrow for her sins, and love unmeasured and unfeigned towards Him, who came into the world to take away her sins; and thus, as Jesus said, her faith had saved her. She

might go away in peace. Peace, which had so long been a stranger to her heart, might return to it now and dwell there for ever; for her sins, though many, had been forgiven. Here, you see, are many points worthy of our imitation. For in reading of other people's sins, we must never forget how much we ourselves need pardon and mercy from God. We must think of our own numberless offences, which we have committed in thought, word, and deed, against His Divine Majesty; and how much we ought to love and bless that gracious Saviour, who died for our sins, that we might not die in them; but be restored, through His intercession, to peace now and to happiness for ever.

See *Luke* vii. 36—50.



TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY EVENING.

THE FAMILY OF CHRIST.

M. After performing two such gracious acts of mercy at Nain, as those I have mentioned to you, and, perhaps, many more which are not recorded, our blessed Lord made another journey throughout Galilee, going through every city and every village, and preaching in them the glad tidings of the kingdom of God: so unwearied was He in His labours of love for us men and our salvation. In this journey He was attended by the Apostles whom He had lately chosen, who were to be witnesses afterwards to the world of what He did and taught; and to learn from

[*Second Series.*]

N

His divine example how to labour themselves in extending the kingdom of God; and we read also of many women who followed Him, some of whom had received great mercies from Christ, being cured by Him of evil spirits and various infirmities, perhaps of many sins too. One of them was called Mary Magdalen, out of whom our Lord cast seven evil spirits; how thankful must she have been to be delivered from this heavy yoke which Satan had put upon her, and to wear instead the easy yoke of Christ! Another was named Joanna; she was the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward.

E. What, Mamma! one of Herod's family amongst the followers of Christ!

M. Little indeed should we have expected to see one of Herod's household in the train of Jesus? Surrounded, as she must have been, by all the luxuries and splendours, as well as by all the corruptions, of such a court, how much must she have had to break through, before she could have joined the disciples of the wandering and despised Saviour! But to God nothing is impossible. His grace can find its way into the palace as easily as into the cottage: can break through the strong-holds of sin and Satan, and maintain its ground even amidst the seducing pleasures and flatteries of courts. These two are mentioned particularly in the word of God as having followed Jesus, and as having been allowed to show their gratitude and love by supplying His wants out of their own substance: and there were "many others" who are not spoken of individually, who cast in their lot with Jesus upon earth, and whose names are no doubt recorded in His book of life. Blessed

women, whoever they were, who were permitted to follow Christ when He was here below ! and blessed, unspeakably blessed all those, who tread in their steps ! who seek their happiness now in His service, instead of looking for it as so many do in an evil world, which has really nothing but vanity and disappointment to bestow on those who serve it best !

Whilst, however, there were some who thus attended upon Christ with reverent affection, and gladly ministered to Him by every means in their power, there were others who tried to hinder Him in His great work. Even His own friends, that is to say, the relations of the Virgin Mary, attributed His zeal in preaching and doing good to madness : they said, “ He is beside himself.” And certainly the Saviour’s zeal, His unwearied earnestness in man’s salvation was very extraordinary, and such as the world had never seen before ; so that we are hardly surprised to find persons, who did not seriously consider the evil of sin, and the value of their souls, saying that our Lord was beside Himself in taking so much pains, and enduring so much hardship, to destroy the one and save the other. Alas ! it is we, poor sinners, who are beside ourselves, in caring so little for these things, and wasting all our anxiety and all our love on the trifles of the world ! This is, indeed, madness, to think only of our perishing bodies, and to forget our immortal souls ! to hear the blessed Jesus inviting us to Him, and yet to turn away as if we had no need of His help !

There were others again, I am sorry to say, who set themselves much more decidedly and more maliciously to speak evil of the good and gracious works

of the Son of God. It happened that whilst the relations of Christ, thinking Him, as we said, beside Himself, were coming to lay hold on Him, there was brought to Him one possessed with a devil, blind and dumb : and He healed him ; so that he, who was before blind and dumb, both spake and saw. The people were astonished and said, " Is not this the Son of David ? " for they took it for granted, that one who could do such things, must be their promised Messiah. And this was, indeed, the right conclusion to be drawn from all that they heard and saw. But his enemies, the Pharisees, having determined not to believe in Him themselves, nor to let the people be persuaded if they could prevent it, made use of the most wicked and absurd arguments, in order to persuade the people not to receive Jesus as their Messiah. His works, so great and good—those merciful and wonderful works—were done, they asserted, by the help of evil spirits. It was Beelzebub, they said, the prince of the devils, that gave our Lord power to cast them out !

E. How dreadful, Mamma ! I almost wonder that even Jesus could bear with them.

M. Wicked and false as their words were, the patient and gentle Saviour not only bore with them, but condescended to reply to them. Knowing the thoughts of His enemies, He showed them how unreasonable it was, to suppose that Satan would help any one to overthrow His own kingdom, which was the object, you know, that our Lord had continually in view, and one chief end both of His teaching and His miracles. Great, before the coming of Christ, had been the power of the wicked one even over the

bodies of men, as well as secretly over their souls. He had made himself a kind of God of this world, and changed it into a habitation of his own, from which none as yet had been able to cast him out. But now, in the person of Jesus, one had come upon earth, who was able to bind the strong one, to take possession of his house, and to spoil him of what he had so long thought to be his own. The Son of God came down from heaven expressly to destroy the works of the devil, to rescue the earth from his dominion, and to deliver both our souls and bodies from his hands. His works were all works of goodness and mercy: His teaching all pure and holy. How perverse then was it to ascribe to Beelzebub the works of Jesus! How wicked to attribute to such an impure source miracles, in which might be so clearly seen a heavenly power and a divine compassion! It was indeed a degree of wickedness, on which one even shudders to think; and it led our Saviour to address to the Pharisees a most awful warning.

But let us turn from the obstinacy of the Pharisees, to contemplate again the loving-kindness of Jesus Christ. Consider how, notwithstanding all this contradiction of sinners, he still went on doing good. Though His friends said, "He is beside himself," and His enemies, that His miracles were performed by the power of Satan, He continued His merciful labours for us men and our salvation, and suffered neither His patience to be exhausted, nor His love to wax cold towards us, because of these ungrateful returns which He met with.

He did indeed warn the Pharisees of the danger which they, and such as they, were in, who abused to

such sad purposes the privileges which they enjoyed: and when not content with His daily miracles, they asked Him to give them some further sign to prove that He was the Christ, He refused to give them one: excepting indeed that He told them beforehand of His own resurrection from the dead, that last and greatest sign of His power, which should be given them.

E. And did they not believe in Him, Mamma, when they heard that He would rise from the dead?

M. No, even to this sign many of the Jews refused to pay regard. Our Lord reminded them of the prophet Jonah, who had lain three days buried in the body of that great fish which the Lord had prepared to swallow him up, and told them that he was but a sign or figure of Himself. Like Jonah, our Lord should lie three days in the grave, and then, like him, be wonderfully restored. He should rise again to life, and cause repentance and remission of sin to be published in His name throughout the world, beginning at Jerusalem. And well would it be for these Pharisees, if they even then repented, as the Ninevites did at the preaching of Jonah, for then their sins might still be forgiven. But, alas! many of them were worse even than the people of Nineveh: nothing would lead them to repentance; they perverted all that was done to save them into an occasion of fresh sin; and so their last state was worse than the first. Therefore, Jesus declared to them: "The men of Nineveh shall rise up in judgment with this generation and shall condemn it; because they repented at the preaching of Jonas, and behold a greater than Jonas is here. The queen of the south," too, the Queen of Sheba, our Lord said, "shall rise up in judgment with

this generation and condemn it; for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here."

But we have dwelt long enough on so sad a subject: yet though it is sad, may the Spirit of God make it profitable to us! May He keep us ever in mind that we too shall one day have to answer for all the advantages we enjoy; and that, if we do not make a wise and holy use of them, the very heathen will put us to shame at the last day!

We will turn now to a more pleasing subject. Whilst our Lord had been warning the Pharisees of their danger, his relations or brethren, as near relations were called among the Jews, arrived together with His mother, and stood without, desiring to speak with Him.

E. Mamma, I dare say the Virgin Mary was very unhappy at thinking that Jesus should be so much with such wicked men, who hated Him so exceedingly. Perhaps she came to beg Him to leave them?

M. I think it very likely, Edward, that she came with a wish to persuade Him not to go on in a course of so much labour and danger, in which powerful enemies were drawn together to hinder Him, whilst there were comparatively very few to thank Him for what He did.

E. But as our Saviour's work was so great and so good, I think it was strange, and a pity too, Mamma, that His own mother and relations should have wished to stop Him in it.

M. It certainly was wrong, and it appears very strange to us, because we know so well, why it was

that the Son of God came down among men, and that the great work of our salvation could not be accomplished without much labour and suffering. But these things were not then so clearly understood even by His own relations. Perhaps they thought that He was only risking a life, which to them was very precious, to no real purpose; and throwing away His kindness upon an evil generation to whom it would be of no use. Little did they think that Christ was then laying the foundation of all human happiness; and that there was no peace, no heaven even for His own mother and brethren, but what He was now providing for them. They were ed, no doubt, by kind though mistaken feelings. We might indeed have thought that the blessed Virgin would have already learnt not to interfere with Christ in His great designs, but to leave Him to His own unerring wisdom in all His works and words.

M. Yes, Mamma, for you know, when He was a child, He had told her very clearly that He must be about His heavenly Father's business.

M. And again, you remember, at the marriage feast our Lord had taught His mother, that in His gracious ministry no human wisdom, not even that of a parent, could direct Him. Yet notwithstanding all this we are not perhaps to wonder, that the blessed Virgin, with a mother's anxiety for the safety of One so holy, so glorious, so beloved, so revered, should forget occasionally what she ought to feel towards Him as Her Lord from Heaven, and think of Him only as her son. Nor would it do merely to try her feelings by those of other mothers, for who but she was ever blessed with such a son! If other mothers love their

children with a love, which none can know but those who have felt it, what must have been the love of her who was chosen the mother of the “Eternal Child?”

“A Son that never did amiss,
That never shamed his mother’s kiss,
Nor crossed her fondest prayer :
Even from the Cross He deigned to bow,
For her His agonized brow ;—
Her His sole earthly care.”

Oh ! who can wonder if the Blessed Virgin, sometimes in her fears forgot her faith, and, even at the risk of displeasing our Lord, would interfere to save Him from evil ?

E. And what did our Lord say, Mamma ? Was He angry with His Mother and His other friends for interrupting Him thus ?

M. He expressed no anger, my dear child ; but only took this opportunity of teaching both them and all His hearers a most gracious and condescending lesson. For when one of the multitude came and said to Him, “Behold thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee, he answered and said, Who is my mother, and who are my brethren ? And he stretched forth his hand towards his disciples and said, Behold my mother and my brethren ! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in Heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.” As if He had said : “This interruption may proceed from kindness ; it is, no doubt, great affection for me that leads my mother and my brethren to seek me thus ; but there is a better love than this ; a love more precious to me, a

love of my Father, which is in Heaven, which will lead them to do His will, however painful, or strange, or dangerous it may be ; a love which will show them to be of His family, and so nearer, and dearer to me, than any earthly relations.”

E. Mamma, I have sometimes thought what a happy thing it must have been to have belonged to our Lord's family on earth ; I little supposed that we could be His relations in a sense so much higher and better. I should never have expected that He would have called us by such kind names.

M. His love to man is indeed inconceivably great ; it is beyond all that we can imagine. What must His disciples have felt when He turned to them and said, “Behold my mother and my brethren?” What infinite condescension ! No doubt it filled them with amazement as well as with gratitude. And their feelings may be ours. What He said to them, He says to each one of His followers, to each one of us, if we really love Him, and show our love by striving to do His heavenly Father's will. Of such, He himself has said, “The same is my brother and my sister and my mother !” It is not enough to say that each humble and devoted follower shall be considered as one of His people. There are far better, and happier things in store for them than this. Each one shall be united to Him so closely that the union can only be compared to some of the sweetest and most sacred of all earthly ties. Each one shall be as dear to Him as a brother, a sister, or even more, as a mother. Here is a subject for our thoughts, Edward : here is an object for our ambition ! Let nothing satisfy us but a place in the Redeemer's family. What is earthly rank, what is human honour

compared with this? Let our places in this world be such as God shall see fit for us to fill. We will not seek great things for ourselves in this way; but we will desire, above all things, to be numbered amongst the friends and relations of Christ. If He stooped so low to call us brethren, to adopt us into the family of God, we will never be content, until we feel that such a name, and such a place, do truly belong to us.

E. Mamma, I wish I could love our Lord Jesus Christ as much as I ought to love Him. But I am afraid I never shall.

M. It is indeed sad and painful to think, how cold our hearts are towards Him; that by nature we do not love Him at all; and that those who love Him best, and serve Him most sincerely, fall far, very far short of what they could desire to feel towards One who has done so much for them. These are thoughts that may well give us pain; that may well make us humble and of a contrite heart; but they must not drive us away from Jesus; they must rather lead us again to Him, and cause us to pray more earnestly to God, to pour into our hearts such love towards Him, that we, loving Him above all things, may obtain His precious promises, which exceed all that we can desire. Such a promise, Edward, as we have had to night; “Whosoever will do the will of my Father which is in Heaven, the same is my brother, and my sister, and my mother.”

See *Luke* viii. 1—3. *Mark* iii. 19—35.

Matt. xii. 22—50.

TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY EVENING.

CHRIST SPEAKING IN PARABLES.

E. I suppose, Mamma, our Lord did not return home with His mother and His brethren.

M. No; He did not allow the mistaken care and kindness of His relatives, any more than the malice of His enemies, to interrupt Him in His great and good work. He continued to teach the people, and the people also continued to throng about Him in great multitudes, following Him even down to the sea-side. There they crowded about Him to such a degree, that He entered into a ship lying close to the shore, and sat down there to teach them, so as to be able to speak to them more freely, and to be heard more easily by them.

E. What sea was that, Mamma? Was it the Mediterranean, for that is the only sea I can recollect near Palestine?

M. The Mediterranean was called by the Jews the Great Sea. But you may remember that they were also accustomed to give the name of seas to their lakes; and that the lake of Gennesareth was likewise called the sea of Galilee. Capernaum, you know, where our Lord had just been teaching, was on the borders of this lake; and it was the same day, on which our Lord had been teaching there, that He went down to the sea-side.

E. Then, Mamma, it could not have been into a great merchant-vessel, or ship of war, that our Lord went, such as we have often seen, and travelled in?

M. No; I should rather think it was a kind of boat or small fishing-vessel, such as was common on the lake, and such as Simon Peter and his brother were using when our Lord called them away to become fishers of men. Perhaps it was even into one of the very vessels of this kind which still belonged to some of the disciples.

You must imagine then our Great Prophet sitting in all humility in one of these fishing-vessels, and from thence instructing the crowds that lined the shores of the lake. And now the Bible tells us, "He spake many things unto them in parables." This was a manner of teaching, of which we have found no mention before in the Gospel history, but which our Lord seems to have first used on this occasion. For we find the disciples now expressing great surprise at His speaking to the people in parables, instead of in a plain discourse. But, Edward, can you tell me what a parable means?

E. I hope I can; for you know I have often read our Saviour's beautiful parables, and you took great pains to make me understand what the word meant. I remember one thing you said was, that they were little stories containing a hidden meaning,—hidden at first, I mean, but which could be found out if we searched for it. And then, Mamma, you read to me that verse in the Psalms which says, "I will incline mine ear to the parable, and show my dark speech upon the harp;" and I recollect your saying that the parable was the "dark speech."

M. So I did; a speech dark at first, but intended, and able if rightly used, to throw light upon the subject it treated of; so as to make it plain to the diligent

hearer, though obscure to the careless; like a dark lamp or lantern, which hides the light from passers by, whilst it illuminates the path of him that carries it. The parables of our Lord were in fact what we should call comparisons, only drawn out to a greater length than our comparisons usually are. We are told indeed that the word *parable*, in the Greek language, from which it is taken, means a comparison, in which things that are alike are brought together for the sake of explaining one by the other. Take for instance, our Lord's first parable, in which he speaks of a sower going forth to sow, and of the different places in which the seed fell, and the different ways accordingly in which it sprang up.

E. Yes, Mamma, I remember; some did not spring up at all, because it fell on the hard high road, or upon the footpath which crossed the field; so that it was trampled under foot by the people that passed by, or was picked up by the birds.

M. And there was some, you know, which fell on stony ground, growing up rapidly, but soon withering away; other among thorns, choked up by the thorns which grew up with it; other on good soil, deep and prepared to receive it, bringing forth fruit abundantly. Such in substance was our Saviour's first parable: and without adding a single word of religious or moral instruction, He ended by calling upon His hearers to give it their utmost attention; saying, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

E. And yet, Mamma, I do not wonder that the disciples should have come to our Lord, as I remember they did, to ask Him to explain this parable to them. For I am sure, if you had told me such a story, I should not have been able to make out the meaning

of it, even if I had listened, as I sometimes do, with all my mind.

M. No, we are not surprised that the disciples should have inquired the meaning, nor that they should have come to our Lord, saying, “Why speakest thou unto them in parables?” for what could the crowd on the shore have made of such a narrative? To them it could be nothing but a “dark speech:” it was so even to the disciples, until Christ explained it to them and it would have been hard and difficult to us still, if in the New Testament the explanation were not to be found as well as the Parable.

E. But, dear Mamma, I cannot understand *why* our Lord should speak to the people in Parables. If any one else had done so, I should have thought it was just to vex and tantalize them. But I am sure He was too kind to act so; I am sure He wished to teach, and not to disappoint them.

M. I think we see, in our Saviour’s answer to His disciples when they asked Him this question, part of His reason for acting thus. He says, “Because it is given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.” By which answer we may understand, that the sacred and precious truths of the Gospel were not to be plain and easy to the careless multitude, who came to hear from mere curiosity or amusement, without any real desire for heavenly knowledge. These should be sent away empty and unsatisfied; they had heard indeed the words of Christ, but those words had fallen on their

ears like a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal, the noise of which would pass away in a little time and be forgotten. But the sincere and earnest inquiries, such as the disciples of Christ, who really loved the truth, and earnestly desired to understand and obey it, they should be enabled not only to know the holy truths of God's word, but to believe and understand them and to feel the happy effects of them upon their own hearts. For whoever makes a good use of the grace bestowed upon him, shall receive that grace more and more abundantly; whilst he who neglects or perverts it, from him shall be taken away even that which he once possessed. We learn also from the words that follow, that our Lord's speaking in parables, was an awful judgment or punishment to those Pharisees who had been so long attending upon his preaching, not with simple and humble minds to receive instruction from it, but merely that they might find fault with it, and catch our Lord in His words. They had had the blessings of salvation held out to them, but had turned away; they had seen with their eyes the miracles of Christ, and heard with their ears all His gracious sayings; but so far from being convinced by them, they had wickedly ascribed those works to Satan, and those words to a madman. The awful consequence was this;—the opportunity they had despised should now be taken away; if they chose to follow Christ still, and hear His words, they should be words that they could not understand. A dreadful dulness should from henceforth fall upon their minds, whilst truth was on every side of them. The light which should shine about them, and guide thousands to eternal life, should be deep darkness to them;—an awful doom,

but such as they had forced the compassionate Saviour to inflict upon them. How deep must have been the guilt which could have drawn from His lips such words as these ; words which make us shudder as we read them : “ Therefore speak I to them in parables : because they, seeing, see not ; and, hearing, they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand ; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive. For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed ; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and should be converted, and I should heal them.”

Thus you see, that the plan of teaching by parables was adopted in the first place, as a punishment to those who had heard the preaching of Christ in such a temper of mind as to make it the means of their own destruction. But even in the midst of wrath the Lord always remembers mercy. No sooner had He pronounced these awful words, than He turns to His disciples and says, “ But, blessed be your eyes for they see ; and your ears for they hear. For verily I say unto you, that many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them ; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.” And then He immediately began to explain to them, in the simplest manner, the parable of the sower ; for our gracious Redeemer was willing to teach all who were *willing to learn*.

And here we may remark that, to the sincere learner, nothing can be more instructive than a parable. Its

darkness to him is only like that of a cloud, which for a little while overshadows the moon, and then passing off causes it to appear the more bright and beautiful. The parables of our Lord no doubt required a good deal of attention from His hearers; but those who were really desirous of instruction would be attentive; and thus you see how useful parables were in distinguishing the earnest inquirer from the more idle hearer, and in checking those who were pressing upon Christ to hear, from indolent curiosity, without any sincere anxiety to become wise unto salvation. Heavenly wisdom is worth all the pains that can be bestowed upon it; and we shall be sure to find out that it cannot be attained without earnestness and diligence on our part.

There is also another thing required in the search after truth, which the parables of Christ brought to the trial; I mean *humility*. For not only did they require attention to understand them when they were explained; but, more than this, an explanation was necessary to show to what each parable applied. Until the key was given, it was a treasure locked up, which no one could use. Do you understand what I mean?

E. Yes, Mamma; for I am sure I should never have found out *what* religious lesson I was to learn from the parable of the sower, if I had not been told.

M. And thus it would have been with all who heard or read it. Every one would see that it was not respecting the growth of corn that Jesus meant to instruct them; all would see that there was some *hidden* meaning in his words, of a far more important

kind. But what that meaning was, it was next to impossible they should find out, without applying to Him for some further explanation, without asking Him, as we said before, for the key which should unlock the treasure. Now this none would be likely to do, but those who were really in search of truth, and were willing to be not only hearers, but disciples of Christ; that is to say His *scholars*, to learn of Him the way of eternal life.

Thus you see that teaching by parables, which seem at first so dark and unintelligible, was an admirable method of trying the hearts of the many different hearers who crowded after Jesus, and of proving how far they were really thirsting for divine knowledge. It separated the diligent from the indolent inquirer; the earnest from the lukewarm; the humble from the proud; the sincere from the hypocritical. Those who were really in earnest would give to our Lord's words the most diligent attention.

E. And if, after trying all they could, they were not able to understand His words, I suppose they had nothing to do but to ask the Lord Jesus to explain them to them?

M. Yes, in that case they must go in the spirit of a little child to Him. They must humbly ask Him to remove their ignorance, to grant them further instruction, to unravel the mystery of His teaching, to chase away the darkness which hung around His speech. This is what the disciples really did; and if *any* of his hearers had done the same, there is no doubt that our Lord would have received them, and allowed them to hear that explanation of His

parables, which in private He gave to His disciples. We cannot doubt this, my dear Edward; for you know our blessed Lord has said Himself that He would not cast out *any* that came to Him.

Let us then learn a valuable lesson from this part of the sacred narrative. Let us remember that, by nature, we are quite as dull, and ignorant, and careless, respecting divine things, as any of our Lord's hearers when He was here on earth; and that, without His help we may read our Bibles for ever, yet know nothing of the things of God; yea His own heavenly words, which fall perhaps so sweetly on our ears, will never touch our hearts. But let us remember, for our encouragement, how graciously our Lord treated His inquiring disciples, explaining to them word for word all that He had spoken. Let us remember too the awful punishment of those who came to hear Him either from curiosity or malice; and how the dark speech of the parable was a just rebuke to the idleness of the one, and a wise check to the wickedness of the other. Persons, who thus trifled with their salvation, and lost or abused these precious opportunities of advancing it, persons who saw our Lord's miracles without being convinced by them, and heard His sermons without being the better for them; these had no just reason to complain at being spoken to, afterwards, in language which they could not understand. Do you think it was strange, Edward, that they should be thus dealt with?

E. No, Mamma; because I am sure our Saviour would have forgiven any of them, that were sorry for their wickedness, and have allowed them to join his

own happy disciples when He taught them in private. And then, you know, the dark speech would have been changed into a bright lamp.

M. So it would ; or it might have become a glass, in which they might have seen reflected continually some blessed truth of the “ kingdom of God.” The most interesting and successful teachers among men have generally allowed their instructions to abound with comparisons. The greatest and best Teacher the world ever saw, has shown how much He approves this method of conveying knowledge. The whole world, under His teaching, was changed into a mirror, reflecting heavenly things. Wherever He trod, sacred truths sprung up as it were under His feet. Read the history of His life attentively, my child, as it is given us in the Gospels, and you will soon see the truth of what I say. I can only now give you a few specimens of it.—Did the disciples, at Christ’s bidding, enclose in their nets a miraculous draught of fishes? He showed them in that an image of their success, when they should become ministers of His Gospel—“ fishers of men.” Did He give sight to the blind? He has no sooner done so, than He declares to the people, that He is the light of the world, to give spiritual sight to the souls of men. From the fields ripening for the reaper’s sickle, He bade His disciples look upon the nations, now ready for the preaching of the Gospel, white with their spiritual harvest. He taught us, in fact, things that we knew not, by comparing them with things already well known to us, and raised the thoughts of men to spiritual and heavenly truth, by pointing out their likeness to the objects which they beheld every day of their lives.

But the subject of our Lord's parables is a copious one, and may furnish us still with interesting matter to talk over another evening; when I hope to renew it with you.

See *Matt.* xiii. 1—17. *Mark* iv. 1—13.
Luke viii. 4—10.

TWENTY-NINTH SUNDAY EVENING.

PARABLES EXPLAINED.

E. You did not explain to me the meaning of our Lord's parable of the Sower, Mamma.

M. No, there was not time last Sunday; indeed I have some hopes that you will be able to tell me what heavenly truth we are there taught. What in the first place was meant by the seed?

E. The seed was the word of God, sown by those who preached it, I think?

M. Just so, but with different effects, according to the kind of hearer by whom it is received. As you know the parable very well, I dare say you can tell me of how many different sorts of hearers our Lord spoke of in His explanation.

E. I think there were four kinds of hearers: one like the hard footpath; another like the stony ground; another like ground covered with thorns; and last of all the good ground.

M. Yes; first of all the careless and inattentive hearers, who do not receive the word into their hearts at all, but no sooner hear, than they forget it again:

persons who will not be at the trouble even to understand what they hear, but suffer the wicked one to take away the word from their hearts, as fast as it is sown. Surely the least we can do, when we hear the word of God, is to give it our best attention, and try to understand it. The Holy Spirit may then be pleased to enable us to receive and keep it, and not suffer the evil one to snatch it from us.

The next class of hearers, you said, were like rocky ground, where the soil may not be hard, like that of the beaten pathway, and like the hearts of careless ones, but loose and easily penetrated, yet shallow, on account of the rockiness of the ground below. Here seed may grow, but cannot take a deep root. Now, Edward, what sort of hearers were these?

E. I think they were those who hear the word of God at first with joy, but have no root, and therefore last but a little time. I think you have told me that as corn, sown by accident upon rocky ground, where the roots had no moisture, would soon wither away under a scorching sun, so these persons would fall away from Christ, and forget the pleasantness they had once found in his words, if any great trial were to come upon them. Have I explained it aright?

M. Yes, you are quite clear in your account, and I dare say you could go on and tell me that the thorns and brambles, in the wild uncleaned ground, or near the hedges, represent those cares and pleasures which, at the very best, overrun the heart of man; and which, so often, alas ! choke the word of God, and prevent it from bringing forth fruit. This is an awful case : for people often go on in this way deceiving themselves ; thinking that they are truly religious, because they listen to

the word of God, and do not turn a deaf ear like the careless ones, nor fall away like the unstable. And yet they do not receive the truth into a sincere and obedient heart; nor does it produce those lively fruits of righteousness which do spring up in some hearts, by the grace of Jesus Christ, to the praise and glory of God. How many dangers, my dear child, are there to be guarded against. Some perish through want of thought; some through want of steadiness; some through worldliness and the love of pleasure, mixing itself with their religion continually, and altogether stopping their progress in the way of life. May God keep us from all these evils, and bestow upon us of His great mercy that honest and good heart, so cultivated and prepared by his grace, that the precious seed sown in it may take deep root, and spring up, and increase day by day continually, and bring forth fruit a hundred-fold.

For this we must pray continually, and at the same time we must not forget, that, like the husbandman, we must take great pains with the ground which is to receive the seed. You have often seen a farmer sowing his wheat, and that too not only with the machines now invented for the purpose, but sometimes in the old fashioned way of scattering it about freely with the hand. Thus when the sower comes near the edges of the field, some may even fall upon the highway, some upon the footpath in the field itself, and some amongst the thorns near the hedges; and there will be some too that will fall upon the stony parts of the field, and the rest upon the ground that has been ploughed and manured, and in other ways carefully prepared to receive the grain. Now our hearts must, in like man-

ner be prepared to receive the word of God. As the prophet says, we must “break up the fallow ground, and not sow among thorns.” We must by God’s grace plough up our sins by the root, and take away all the ill weeds of pride, and idleness, and folly, and look to God “until he rain righteousness upon us,” and give us the fruits of our labours.

The farmer knows, or ought to know, that he can do nothing without God; for what would become of all his toil, if God did not give him a soil capable of being made fruitful, and the means of preparing and enriching it; if He did not give him seed to sow as well as multiply that seed by his refreshing dews, and ripening suns, and fertilizing rains from heaven. But though these are the great things, and every farmer knows it, yet he knows he must work too, and that God will not encourage him in idleness, by giving rich crops, without abundance of care, and skill, and toil.

E. I see, Mamma; he must work in preparing the ground, and must watch the seed when it is sown, and be careful to keep it safe from the birds, and clean from the weeds that would hurt it.

M. Yes; and it is thus that we must work out our salvation; not because we can save ourselves, any more than we can make the corn grow; because it is God that works in us and with us, enabling us to will and to do that which is good, and bestowing upon us the fruits of righteousness, if we cultivate them carefully in our hearts, and implore them earnestly from Him. His abundant goodness and grace towards us, make it doubly our duty not to be idle and careless, but diligent in making a good use of all the

[*Second Series.*]

means of improvement, which he has bestowed upon us. I think you will never more cross a corn-field, or see the farmer scattering the grain, without thinking of this beautiful parable of our Lord; and praying earnestly that your heart may be like the good ground.

E. Was the parable of the sower the only one which our Lord spoke at this time?

M. No: there were several others, which I cannot now attempt to explain at full length. I do not, indeed, intend to go through the parables with you, because we have studied many of them before now, and because you have very valuable books already on your shelves explaining them all. I have only gone over the parable of the sower, you see, very slightly: but what I have said, by way of explaining that, may help you to understand all the rest, almost of yourself, or at least with such explanations of them, as you will find in the Bible itself. If you look to the chapter from which I have taken the parable of the sower, you will find that there were several others spoken by our Saviour, either on the lake itself, or when he returned to Capernaum.

E. Yes, Mamma; I see there is the parable of the wheat and the tares in the same field. I suppose the righteous and the wicked are spoken of here?

M. Yes; the righteous and the wicked grow up together in this world, nor can the wicked be plucked up without doing harm to the righteous also: so that both are allowed to remain together until the harvest, when the reapers, that is to say the angels, will carefully separate the one from the other. The unprofitable tares they will bind up in bundles to burn; but the valuable wheat, the precious grain, in other

words the really righteous, they will collect into the kingdom of their Father, there to shine forth like suns for ever.

Then, by the slow and unseen growth of corn, our Lord showed how gradually, "without observation," His Gospel should be spread throughout the world. And thus it increases in our hearts also. The kingdom of God within us is established by very slow degrees. The seed of piety springs up we know not how, excepting that we know it comes not naturally, but is planted there by God.

First, there is the blade;—the first precious promise of any thing lovely and good: then comes the ear;—an appearance and beginning of the fruits of the Spirit: then the full corn in the ear;—that delightful progress in holiness, those great victories over sin, that blessed meetness for heaven, which many and many a Christian, as he comes nearer the end of his life, has been enabled by God's grace to arrive at. And last of all is the rejoicing of the reapers, when the time of the harvest is come. Then he that once went on his way weeping because of his sins, his toils, his difficulties, and his troubles, shall go home with joy carrying his sheaves with him. Oh! for our share, Edward, in that blissful harvest-home!

A lesson very much the same as this is taught in the parable of the mustard seed, which from a very small plant grows to be a tree large enough for the birds to lodge in. How little was the flock of Christ at first! See it spreading now over the whole world, and gathering into it all nations and languages! How slight in your dear little sister's mind must be the knowledge of the truth! Yet do we hope that she

will one day prove a wise and ripe Christian, able to instruct others also.

The leaven in the measures of meal, which by degrees leavens the whole lump, teaches the same encouraging truths. However slight our goodness may be at first, let us not be disheartened : but go on, and God will bless our endeavours after Him ; until our whole temper, and conduct, and character, is brought under the rich influence of His grace.

And then, my dear Edward, from the last parable delivered by our Lord on His return to the house in Capernaum, let us learn to take care how we hear these sacred truths. They are not taught us for nothing. A candle is not brought to be put under a bushel, but on a candlestick, to give light, and to show us all that the darkness hid. So the truth should teach us to know ourselves, and to know and choose the things that belong to our everlasting peace ; to distinguish between right and wrong, between good and evil. We must, in short, *use* the light which is given us ; remembering that we must by and by give an account of every talent which God has been pleased to trust to our care. The knowledge of the truth, the knowledge of Christ's salvation, is one of these talents. Sad is the case of those who hide this light—the light of the glorious Gospel of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ—instead of letting it shine in their characters to give light to all around. The more we use this light, the more will it be shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost. If we use what is given, we shall most certainly have more : but if we waste and neglect it, we shall lose even what we had before. I have often heard it observed, that men

who neglect or disobey the teaching of the Gospel frequently become remarkably unwise in other matters. They seem to lose the proper use even of the powers of their understandings, and give themselves up to the most foolish and unreasonable courses. May we ever rejoice in the light, and walk as children of the light, that our lamp may not be put out in darkness !

E. I suppose a great many people did come to our Lord, to beg Him to explain to them what they did not understand in His parables ?

M. Not a great many I am afraid ; for there is nothing of the kind said in the Gospels. Some few indeed seem to have had their hearts deeply touched by what they had heard and seen : so much so, that they offered to become followers of Jesus, to attend His steps. Two of these are particularly mentioned to us, and that in ~~such~~ a manner as to lead us to feel a great interest about them. Our Lord, it seems, was on the point of leaving the place where He had been delivering these parables, when one of His hearers, a scribe he is called, drew near and begged to be allowed to accompany Him ; unwilling, I suppose, to lose sight of One from whose lips he had first heard the words of eternal life, he said to Him, “ Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.” And another came, immediately after, expressing the same wish, but adding one request, which was that he might be permitted to go first and bury his father.

E. I should like to hear our Lord’s answer, Mamma ; but I am quite sure He would give them leave to come with Him.

M. And so am I, my love, if they were quite sin-

cere in their request. But of this there seems some doubt; as our Saviour, instead of saying to them, as He had done before to Peter, and James, and John, "Follow me," began to tell them very plainly how much patience, and self-denial, and firm endurance it would require thus to come after Him. He told them of His poverty; that He had no home in this world to offer them; that, poorer far than the foxes which have holes, or than the birds of the air which have nests, the Son of man, although Son of God too, had not where to lay His head. This was His answer to the first, and it would plainly prove whether he wished to follow Him from real love to His person, or from any hope of worldly gain or honour. To the second He said, "Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead:" showing as clearly that, though He could promise them no earthly rewards for doing so, yet He expected those who became His followers to give up every thing for His sake.

E. But people need not now give up their homes, and their employments, and even their dearest friends, need they, Mamma, in order to be Christ's true disciples?

M. Things are altogether much altered now; it is impossible for any of us to become personal followers of our Lord, as those who loved Him once did. We cannot like them attend upon His ministry here on earth; and we can easily imagine that much would be required in those days, which would not be always necessary or even possible. The period when Christ Jesus was dwelling amongst us in His human nature was a very extraordinary one, the most extraordinary that the world ever knew. We do not then wonder that it was marked by mira-

cles on the one hand, and by sacrifices on the other, of no common kind. If Christ's people were to do now every thing that the first Christians were called upon to do, both the world and the Church would be thrown into great confusion. Yet the sacrifices which we see them called upon to make may teach us what sort of *spirit* it is, that our Lord requires in us still. We may see that He expects us to value His service above all the riches, and honours, and pleasures of the world, and to love Him better even than we love our nearest and dearest relatives. So that if it should ever become necessary in order to do our duty faithfully towards Christ, to give up any things or any persons that we dearly love, we must be ready to do so at once. This has been the case, you know, long and long after our Saviour's time on earth; and who shall say that it may never be the case again?

E. Are you thinking, Mamma, of Wicliffe and Latimer and Cranmer? or of any of the Apostles who died for Christ's sake?

M. My thoughts were going back to all "the noble army of Martyrs;" those who shed their blood for Christ in the early ages of the Gospel, and those who for His sake counted their lives no longer dear to them at the time of the Reformation. Many of these were high in rank, and rich in wealth; yet rather than forsake Christ and His Gospel, rather than exchange any of the blessed truths that the Gospel teaches for the false doctrines of men, they exchanged their wealth for poverty, and their rank for disgraceful punishments. These alone were hard things to flesh and blood; but these saints of holy memory bore greater things than

these for the sake of Jesus Christ. Many of them had dear friends, or still dearer brothers and sisters and parents, or most beloved wives and children; yet even these they left for Him, and went alone into the fire that they might meet their dear families again with joy in an eternal home.

E. How I love, Mamma, to hear of those holy men! What very great sacrifices they made for Christ; much greater I think than that which our Lord asked this new disciple to make: I mean that one whom He told to follow Him directly without even waiting to bury his father.

M. They certainly were exceeding great sacrifices: but you must consider, on the other hand, how great and glorious He is who required them, and how abundantly able and willing He is to repay us for any sacrifices which we make in His name;—yes, and to take care too of any of those dear relatives whom He sometimes commands His disciples to give up to His charge, instead of continuing to watch over them themselves. In considering the Martyrs' sufferings, we must never lose sight of the Martyrs' crown. Faith will tell us, what it told them, "that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed" hereafter;—it will remind us of that "exceeding and eternal weight of glory," with the thoughts of which St. Paul comforted himself and all his fellow-sufferers; it will whisper in our ears, again and again, those encouraging words which the Lord Jesus left us, "I say unto you, that whosoever hath left wife, or children, or houses, or lands for my sake and the Gospel's, he

shall receive manifold more in this present life, and in the world to come *everlasting life*."

See *Matt.* xiii. 18—53; viii. 18—22. *Mark* iv.
14—35. *Luke* viii. 11—18.

THIRTIETH SUNDAY EVENING.

MIRACLES ON THE LAKE, IN DECAPOLIS, AND CAPERNAUM.

M. We were talking last Sunday of our Saviour's power to provide for the happiness and safety of those who give themselves up into His hands. We have an extraordinary instance of this given us immediately after the account of the scribe and the other disciple who wished to follow him. I told you that the Lord Jesus was on the point of leaving that part of the country when they came to Him. Accordingly we find Him directing His disciples to cross over to the other side of the lake; and that He entered into a ship and they followed him.

E. The lake of Gennesareth—was it not, Mamma?

M. It was; and I have read that this lake, though calm and beautiful to look at in general; is subject to very sudden and violent storms. It seems that one of these great tempests arose just as they were in the act of crossing the lake, and that the wind was very high, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was full of water, and the danger became very great.

E. Ah! I know that a storm at sea is a very dreadful thing; but I should not much have minded this storm: for, you know, our Lord Jesus Christ was there.

M. Perhaps in your fear you might have forgotten, as the disciples did, that One “ Mightier than many waters,” One greater than the storm, was with you. Wearied with His labours, our blessed Lord had fallen asleep in the ship. Now they might have known, from all that they had seen of Christ, that, asleep or awake, He was equally able to deliver them. But their faith failed them ; fear got possession of their hearts ; and, terrified with the storm, they came to Him and awoke Him, saying, “ Lord, save us ; we perish.” What a mixture of faith and want of faith was here ! Some faith they must have had, or they would not have thought of going to Jesus to awake Him, and to entreat Him to save them. But there was also much want of faith ; or they would not have talked of perishing, when their Almighty Saviour was at their side. Wearied in body, but unwearied in patience and compassion, the blessed Jesus arose from the pillow on which He had been resting for a little while, and, though He gently reproved them for their unbelief, saying, “ Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith ?” he immediately “ rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm.” What a display of Omnipotence was here ! Not only do disease and death yield to the voice of Jesus, but the winds and the waves, those powerful and uncontrollable elements, are obedient to His word. He rebukes the storm and it ceases ; He says to the sea, “ Peace, be still,” and immediately there is a perfect calm. Well may we say with the astonished disciples, “ What manner of person is this, who commandeth even the winds and waves, and they obey Him ?” Has He not a right to command our obedience also under any circumstances whatever ? Shall

the winds and the waves be still at His bidding, and shall our stubborn and rebellious hearts rise up against Him, and refuse to submit to His power, or yield to His love? This would be sad indeed; it would make us like to those evil spirits, who on every occasion delighted to oppose themselves to Christ, but whose resistance only overwhelmed them in ruin. A dreadful instance of this lies before us now.

No sooner had our Saviour crossed the lake, and come to the country of the Gergesenes, which lay on the other side, than there met Him a most miserable man possessed with evil spirits, and so completely under their dreadful influence, that he was exceeding fierce; so that no man could venture to approach the place where he dwelt. But though their power was so terrible, these wicked beings trembled at the approach of Christ. And though they were here collected in such a numerous and powerful company, as to call themselves Legion (that is, a large and compact host), yet were they driven, in an agony of fear, to entreat Christ not to torment them with those punishments which they well knew they deserved, which they knew equally well Jesus was able, if He chose, to inflict upon them.

E. I think I recollect a little of this story, Mamma. Did not our Lord oblige them to come out of the poor unhappy man, and did He not allow them to go into a herd of swine, that was feeding near by?

M. He did; and you may remember how the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters. From which we may judge of the power of this desperate band of wicked spirits, who were yet so afraid of Christ: and

you may form some idea, how great He must be in the eyes of all spiritual beings, good or bad, and how great therefore He ought to be in our eyes also, and how dreadful should be the thought of ever doing any thing to displease Him, or of hesitating a moment to obey His commands ; especially when we reflect, that He is not more powerful, than He is kind and gracious, and compassionate to poor fallen man.

At this very moment, when the devils trembled at the sight of Him, and the winds and the waves fell prostrate at His feet, call to mind how poor He was, without a home, without a couch to rest upon ; His only repose from His continual labours being what He could snatch, amidst a raging storm, in the stern of a fishing boat. But this poverty was voluntary ; it was undertaken by the Son of God in infinite love to our souls. “ For our sakes He became poor ; that we, through His poverty, might be made rich.” This is a subject that fills us with wonder now, and we shall perhaps wonder at it through all eternity.

E. And what became of the poor man, whom our Lord delivered from those wicked spirits ?

M. You must think of Him, as shortly afterwards “ sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in His right mind.” A memorial of the Lord’s compassion in the midst of His mighty power ;—like a bright ray of sunshine gilding a thunder cloud, or like the soft and beautiful rainbow, which stood across the arch of Heaven at the close of the deluge, a token of the tender mercy of God !

It was seldom that our gracious Lord wrought miracles of mere power : His works were almost

always works of goodness also. This is the only instance to the contrary mentioned in the Gospels. "He came not into the world to condemn the world, but that the world, through Him, might be saved:" and in this spirit He went about continually doing good. We read indeed once of His causing an unfruitful tree to wither, but it was out of kindness to men; to teach them the necessity of bringing forth the fruits of righteousness. Again, in working the miracle of which we have just been speaking, He suffered a herd of swine to be destroyed. This may surprise us for a moment; but even to touch these animals was forbidden expressly to the Jews, and we cannot therefore wonder that the Son of God should mark His displeasure against those who disobeyed the Law, by allowing the evil spirits to go into the swine.

E. Where did you say all this happened, Mamma?

M. In the country of the Gergesenes, which was part of the region of Decapolis to the south east of the sea of Galilee. In two of the Gospels it is called the country of the Gadarenes; for the towns, Gergesa and Gadara, were near to each other, and the pasture perhaps between them and the sea was common to them both. This part of the country was inhabited partly by Jews, and partly by Gentiles. Whether the owners of the swine were Jews or Gentiles, we are not told. If Jews, they acted directly against their law in keeping swine. If Gentiles, they showed great contempt for the religion of the country, and needed to be taught to reverence whatever God appoints, whether understood by them or not. You will see Decapolis, as well as the towns of Gadara and Gergesa, marked upon the map.

Here our Lord had landed after the storm from which He had just saved His disciples. One would suppose that the people of the country would rejoice to see Him among them, be thankful for the arrival of one so wise to instruct them, so kind to do them good, so powerful to deliver them from their enemies, especially when they saw the poor demoniac sitting at His feet, calm and happy.

E. Yes! they must, I am sure, have been very glad to have Jesus among them; very thankful to Him for crossing over to their side of the country.

M. Alas! they were not. So far from it, that they came in a great body to beg Him to depart out of their coast. They thought more, it should seem, of the loss of their unlawful gains in the destruction of the swine, than of what had been done for their poor fellow countryman. It stands recorded against them, in the Bible, that the whole city came out to meet Jesus; and that when they saw Him, "they besought Him to depart out of their coasts."

E. Beseeching the Lord Jesus Christ to leave them! Mamma, there is something in that which seems quite dreadful.

M. It is, indeed, dreadful to think that there should be any persons in the world, who would rather be abandoned by Christ, than forsake their sins. But I fear their case is by no means uncommon. Christ Jesus requires his followers to give up every thing, if necessary, for his sake. These deluded people would not even give up their unlawful practices. They looked more at Christ's power to punish, than at his willingness to save them: little thinking what a door of mercy was opening to them, they entreated the

Saviour of the world to leave them to themselves ; to leave them to their sins ! We may well mourn over them ; for their case demands our liveliest pity. Unhappy men ! they knew not what they asked. But their dreadful prayer was heard ; “ Jesus went up into the ship and departed from them ; ” and we never read of his returning any more.

But, oh ! the riches of His goodness, and mercy, and long suffering ! He would not go away without showing still some pity to this benighted people ; without leaving amongst them one witness and messenger of His goodness. For when the restored demoniac entreated Jesus to allow him to accompany Him, our Lord refused his request, and said to him, “ Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.”

E. Poor man, I am sorry too that he could not go with Jesus, but must stay with those wicked men.

M. Observe, however, that our Lord thus gave him an opportunity of showing his gratitude and love to Him far more, perhaps, than if He had permitted him to go with Him wherever He went. We must not always choose our own way of serving Christ. It is far safer and better that He should choose for us our path in life, and that we should be willing to serve Him wherever He may see fit to send us. This is the only way to be really happy, and really sure that we love the Lord for all His goodness towards us. The poor man whom we are reading of, sets us a sweet example. He longed to go with Jesus, and earnestly prayed that he might be allowed to do so ; but when his request was refused, he did not murmur ; resigning his own

will to that of his Master, he cheerfully obeyed His command. With a heart overflowing with gratitude for the mercies he had received, he went his way, proclaiming not only to his own friends, but in Gadara and all Decapolis, how great things Jesus had done for him.

Leaving Decapolis, our Lord returned across the lake again to Capernaum, to continue His labours of love and miracles of mercy.

Some of these fresh instances of His goodness are related to us; and I am sure you will like to hear of them. One of the persons, who was so happy as to obtain the notice of our Lord, was a ruler of the synagogue, named Jairus. He came to the Lord Jesus in great distress, and, "falling at his feet, besought him greatly;" and you will feel for him very much, when I tell you the reason of his being so very unhappy. You shall hear it in his own words. He said to our Lord, "My little daughter lieth at the point of death, nay, she is even now dead; I pray thee come and lay thine hands upon her, and she shall live."

E. Poor man! I do pity him, Mamma; but I am glad to think that he had such great faith. You see he believed that Jesus could give his little girl back to him again.

M. I need hardly tell you that Jesus arose at once and followed him. To the cry of distress His ear is always open. The prayer of faith never fails to be accepted by Him. But it was not enough to relieve this one case of affliction. In His way to the house of Jairus, another miracle is wrought by that gracious, that wonder-working hand. Whilst Jesus was walking along to the ruler's house, a great multitude of people

crowded around Him. Among them was a poor woman who had been very sick, for twelve years, and whom no man else could cure. She had, indeed, spent all that she had upon physicians, in the hopes of getting well; but all in vain, she had not grown any better, but rather the worse. Now when this poor creature had heard of Jesus, she came in the crowd behind Him and touched His raiment, saying to herself, "If I may but touch His clothes, I shall be whole." A wonderful instance of faith! And yet so great was her humility and her deep sense of her own unworthiness, that she was filled with very great fear, when our Lord, knowing what had passed, turned about and said, "Who touched my clothes?" Nothing, you know, could be hidden from Him. He is omniscient as well as almighty. But though He knew, He condescended to inquire, in order to make known to those about Him the faith of this poor woman, and hold it up for their imitation. The brightest patterns of true faith are often found in those who shrink from public notice; who are glad perhaps to hide themselves from their fellow Christians, and are almost afraid even of applying to the Saviour for relief. They would be glad to be made whole, without any one knowing it: but there is One, from whom they cannot be hid. Amongst the multitude that throng and press about Him, as it were, in the countries where His name is known, Jesus distinguishes at once those who approach Him, however timidly or secretly, with a true faith. Yea, He often brings them forth against their will, to make them an example to His whole Church. The poor woman in the Gospel came trembling, fearing, it should seem, lest she should have presumed too

much on our Lord's compassion. What must have been her surprise and her joy on hearing these gracious words, "Daughter, be of good comfort, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace."

Whilst Christ was speaking to the woman, a messenger came from the house of Jairus, telling Him that his daughter was dead, and that therefore there was no need to trouble Jesus any more. But our Lord said to Jairus, "Fear not; only believe." How soothing to the poor father must those few words have been! It was not then too late for Jesus to help him. Nothing was too hard for Him. He had already, you know, raised from his bier the widow's son; but this the friends of Jairus had either never heard or had forgotten. We see this very clearly, as we go on with the story. When our blessed Lord approached the house there was a great tumult, and the friends of the little girl were weeping and lamenting bitterly. At once to soothe and check their immoderate grief, Jesus said to them, "Why make ye so much ado, and weep? she is not dead, but sleepeth." This indeed was very true; for to the Lord Jesus death is a mere sleep, from which He can awake us when He pleases. This little girl was dead, indeed, to her friends, but only asleep to Jesus. He that can raise the dead, may well call the things which are not as though they really were. And what is all death but a sleep?

But this was all quite strange to the persons now gathered around that bed of death. And when they heard those comfortable words of our Lord, "She is not dead, but sleepeth," they only "laughed him to scorn." Then Jesus put them all out of the room, allowing only His disciples, Peter, and John, and

James, and the father and mother of the child, to witness that waking out of sleep. And taking hold of the little girl's hand, which was hanging stiff and cold by her side, He said unto her, "Damsel, I say unto thee arise." The little girl heard the voice of Jesus, and awoke, as if from a sweet and comfortable sleep. Nor did she awake to pain and sorrow. No, she arose in perfect health from her sick bed, and walked about among her friends in the full enjoyment of life and strength. We are not surprised to find the sacred historian adding, that "the people were astonished with a great astonishment." We may wonder with them at all that we read of this great and glorious Saviour; but to our wonder may we be enabled to add faith, and love, and obedience !

See *Matt.* viii. 23—34 ; ix. 18—36. *Mark* iv. 36—43. *Luke* viii. 22—56.

THIRTY-FIRST SUNDAY EVENING.

THE GOSPEL PREACHED THROUGH THE TOWNS OF
GALILEE.

M. I intended last Sunday, my dear Edward, to have told you of two other miracles, which our blessed Lord worked just as He left the ruler's house ; but we had not time then.

E. May I not hear them now, dear Mamma ?

M. We are told that, as Jesus was going away, two blind men followed Him, crying, and saying, "Thou Son of David, have mercy on us ;" and when He was come into the house, they came to Him

again; and Jesus said to them, "Believe ye that I am able to do this? They said unto him, yea, Lord. Then touched he their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you. And their eyes were opened." There was also a poor dumb man brought to Him, possessed by an evil spirit, whom our Lord immediately healed. No kind of misery was beyond His power to relieve. Any one of these miracles was enough to cause astonishment. How much more when so many followed one upon another, and those too miracles of every description! Well might the people say, "It was never so seen in Israel." And yet it is melancholy to think how comparatively few, after all, believed in Christ, of those who saw His wonderful works, and heard His divine teaching. It is sad to see how perversely the Pharisees persisted in their obstinate endeavours to persuade the people that our Lord's almighty works of goodness were done by the assistance of the Evil One. How awful to hear them say, "He casteth out devils through Beelzebub the prince of the devils!" Even the people of His own country, I mean Nazareth, where He seems to have gone next, the people of that city, which He had chosen as the home of His childhood, even they rejected Him. Nay, strange to say, they were among the most forward to turn away from Christ in a spirit of unbelief. They had once, in the madness of their anger against Him, wickedly attempted even to destroy Him, by thrusting Him down from the top of the hill on which Nazareth was built; and would have done so, had He not delivered Himself out of their hands; which He did in a moment, passing through the midst of them unhurt.

For, you know, no one had power to hurt Jesus in the least, far less to touch His precious life, unless He Himself permitted them to do so ; and this of course He did not choose to do until His hour was come, and He had finished the great work He had come into the world to accomplish. But think of our Saviour's patience, in not abandoning these wicked people without one more endeavour to save them. He visits them again ! No malice, no revenge could dwell in the Saviour's breast. Nothing could weary Him in His endeavours to instruct and benefit mankind. Not even the basest ingratitude could keep Him away : He returns once more to Nazareth.

E. And yet I am afraid from what you said, they were not glad to receive Him.

M. No ; the same spirit of unbelief still held the people in bondage. They saw and acknowledged His wisdom and His wondrous works ; but saw and acknowledged in vain. Prejudice still closed their hearts against any real belief ; so much so that our Lord Himself marvelled at their want of faith, and again He left them to go and teach in the villages round about.

E. Mamma, it seems very strange to me that when people saw our Lord's miracles and His great wisdom, they should not believe in Him, but should even treat Him so unkindly.

M. Melancholy it was indeed, but not, I fear, extraordinary. The Gospel is even now in our day too often received, as its blessed Author was, with perverseness and unbelief. Still are deeds of the purest charity frequently repaid with ingratitude. It was the same spirit which set itself against our Lord Him-

self; and if we would imitate His example, we must expect something of the same kind of treatment: we must not be surprised if our very endeavours to do good should produce in others a feeling of dislike and unkindness. I do not say it will always be so; but we must not wonder, nor be disturbed, if we occasionally find it so. Still even then we must learn from our Lord to go on endeavouring to overcome evil with good; and to do kindness, not so much for the sake of human gratitude, as to be like our Lord, to please Him, and to show the reality of our faith in Him. And for our encouragement in so difficult a path, let us remember how glorious are the rewards which our Saviour has purchased in heaven for those who walk in His steps on earth.

E. So our Lord really left Nazareth again, when He would, if they would have received Him, have done so much for them. Well, it was a great pity! But I should like to know where He went next.

M. St. Matthew tells us that "He went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the Gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people." And whilst He did so much to relieve the bodily miseries of the people amongst whom He moved, you will easily believe that He felt still more for their spiritual wants; I mean the maladies and wants of their souls. If holy and good men in all ages have felt for the souls of their fellow creatures, how much more must their Saviour have pitied them, He who so well knew the value of those souls, and the price He meant to pay for them. On every side He saw multitudes surrounding Him, who had none

to watch over them, none to instruct them, none to guide their feet into the way of peace; and seeing them He was moved with compassion because they fainted and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Here was indeed much to be done; thousands of poor perishing souls to bring back to God a plenteous spiritual harvest, but none to gather it: and turning to His disciples, as if to interest them in such a work, and convey to their hearts some of the pity which touched Him, He said to them, "Pray ye the Lord of the harvest that he will send forth labourers into his harvest."

E. I thought, Mamma, our Lord had already chosen twelve apostles to help Him in teaching the people?

M. Yes, He had chosen from among His disciples twelve, who were in an especial manner, to attend His steps; that afterwards, when He should be taken away from them, they might declare to the whole world what they had seen Him do and heard Him teach; and even whilst our Lord was here on earth, He was pleased to employ the twelve as His messengers to mankind. For so great were the multitudes which flocked to Him from all parts, that He called the apostles to Him, and sent them out two and two into different places, to preach the Gospel to their countrymen, and to proclaim to them that the kingdom of heaven was at hand; that is, that their long promised Messiah was come, that He was about to set up His kingdom in the world, and expected their obedience to its laws.

E. Then, Mamma, the kingdom that Daniel had foretold was come at last; that kingdom, I mean, which was to come after the Roman empire, which was to

break in pieces all other kingdoms, and last itself for ever and ever. I suppose then the Roman empire did not last much longer?

M. No; like the great empires that had gone before it, its glory has long since vanished away; whilst the kingdom of Christ, then so mean and obscure, has increased day by day, and is still continually spreading on every side and subduing all things to itself: nor will it end, like other kingdoms, but endure, not only through the ages of this world, but through all eternity. Of this kingdom the apostles were now to assist their divine Master in laying the foundation: such was the great work on which they were sent forth.

E. I wonder whether they could work miracles?

M. Of themselves they had no such power; but our Lord was pleased to bestow it on them. They "all received," as St. John says, "out of his fulness;" and thus they were enabled, not in their own name, as our Saviour did, but in that name which is above every name, even the name of Jesus, to heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, and cast out devils. Thus they were to be introduced to their future labours when their Divine Master should be taken away; and not only to their labours, but to their sufferings and persecutions also. For great was the opposition, and many the trials, with which they had to contend. Preeminent indeed was their rank as apostles of the Son of God, and distinguished the honour conferred upon them as His chief ambassadors to the world; but it was not like worldly distinction; it would not lead them to earthly riches or human honours. On the contrary, they were to be persecuted and reviled

for no other reason whatever, but because they were Apostles of Christ.

E. That was very strange.

M. Strange indeed, in one sense ; and yet the world, you know, is an evil world, and is not worthy of those holy men, whom God is pleased to raise up in it to testify against its sins, and to teach men the way of righteousness and life. I do not mean to say that no good men have ever lived in prosperity and honour in the world ; for there are many instances to the contrary, as I am sure you can recollect.

E. Yes ; Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, were all rich and great ; and so were Noah, Job, and Daniel.

M. Nor must we forget Joseph, and David, and Hezekiah, though all these were at times sorely tried. But what I would observe to you is, that some of the most distinguished servants of God have been proverbial for their sufferings, and even for the shame and reproach, which during their lives were cast upon their names. Such was the case with most of the prophets, and also with the apostles of Christ. Nor would they be astonished when they found it so. Our Lord plainly told them beforehand of all these things ; told them that He sent them forth as sheep among wolves ; assured them that as men treated Him, they would also treat them ; and that they should indeed be hated of all men for His name's sake.

E. I almost wonder that they were not afraid to go.

M. The blessed promises, which our Lord added, no doubt sustained them. He had said that they must suffer many things, but He had said also, " He that endureth to the end shall be saved : whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my

[*Second Series.*]

Father which is in heaven." He had prepared them for bitter persecutions and cruel deaths, but at the same time He had said, "The very hairs of your head are all numbered; fear not them which kill the body and are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him, which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. He that findeth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it; and he that taketh not up his cross and followeth after me is not worthy of me."

Their hopes and desires, you see, were directed by the Lord Jesus to a far greater and better reward, than any which the world can afford; and this sustained them under all their sufferings, and enabled them, though fully forewarned of all that should happen to them, to go forth with joy upon their sacred mission; taking with them neither provisions nor money, nor even a change of raiment. For such was our Lord's will; that His power might appear no less in providing for their wants, than in working miracles by them. Never was there a meaner embassy in appearance sent forth than this; never one in reality more powerful. Twelve simple men (unlearned for the most part, as well as poor,) setting out on foot, two and two, without any attendants; nay in a state of the greatest poverty, destitute of all things; yet going forth to begin the great work of persuading the world to submit to the reign of Jesus of Nazareth, and to proclaim that His kingdom was at hand. When we look at the success which in due time followed their labours, we then see, in the weakness of the instruments made use of, the exceeding greatness of that power, which, through them, caused the religion of Christ to prevail throughout the world. We acknow-

ledge that they were ambassadors from the King of kings.

When He had sent forth the twelve, our Lord continued still to preach Himself in the cities of Galilee ; and thus the knowledge of His name was spreading more and more in every direction, till at last it reached even to the court of Herod.

That wicked man trembled on his throne as he heard of Jesus ; not that he knew who Jesus was, but that his guilty conscience disturbed him with the fear that it was John the Baptist, risen from the dead.

E. I did not know that John was dead ?

M. You heard that Herod had cast him into prison ; and I must now tell you how that crime was shortly followed by another more dreadful. This faithful servant of God had offended Herod very much by telling him plainly of his sins. For Herod had committed a very grievous crime ; he had taken away his brother Philip's wife, and married her himself ; and John was too holy and too sincere a servant of God, to see this and keep silence. He spoke plainly to Herod about it, and in consequence was cast into prison ; though Herod respected him, and in many things listened gladly to his instructions. But John had a most bitter and revengeful enemy in Herodias, the wicked woman who had left her husband, and who could not forgive the servant of God for having endeavoured to persuade Herod to put her away. She bore in her heart a deadly hatred against John ; she was not satisfied with his punishment ; the miseries of a prison were not enough for her ; she was determined to be still further revenged upon him, and watched narrowly for an

opportunity of putting him to death. For some time, however, she was disappointed in her malicious intentions, for Herod had still a great respect for John. At length an occasion occurred, which she thought would suit her purpose. Herod's birthday was come, and he gave a great banquet to "his lords, high captains, and chief estates of Galilee." Now it happened that Salome, a daughter of Herodias, came in and danced, and pleased Herod so much, that he promised, with a solemn oath, to give her any thing she might ask, even to the half of his kingdom.

E. How strange that was, Mamma, merely for dancing before him ! I wonder what Salome asked.

M. It was, undoubtedly, a foolish and rash promise, such as a wise king would not have made at all, and which Herod perhaps would not have made in his more sober moments. Little did he dream of the consequences of his folly ; little did he foresee what a snare he was laying for himself. On receiving so extraordinary a promise, Salome, it should seem, could not tell what to choose, and she went to consult her mother, saying, "What shall I ask?" Many were the favours which Salome might innocently have requested at the king's hands ; and many good and valuable things might a wise and affectionate mother have placed before her daughter's thoughts : but none of these occurred to the bloody heart of Herodias. Her mind, bent upon revenge, and ever watchful to accomplish its dreadful purposes, thinks only of one object—the death of the Baptist—the murder of the holy man who had dared to censure her marriage with Herod. In this rash promise she beheld the

opportunity for which she had waited so long ; and when Salome inquired, " What shall I ask ? " she simply answered, " The head of John the Baptist."

E. What a dreadful request ! I think it must even have shocked Herod.

M. It did ; and distressed him too ; he was " very sorry," and would gladly have saved this faithful servant of God : but because he had made such a solemn promise, and because he was ashamed to show before all the people how much he cared for John, he granted the abominable request, and commanded his head to be brought to Salome ; who took it to her mother, glad I daresay herself to get rid of such a cruel sight.

E. Mamma, I know it is right to keep our promises, and it is right to obey our parents, and yet I cannot help thinking that it was very wrong of Herod to keep *that* promise, and wicked too in Salome to obey *that* command even from her mother. What do you think ?

M. Just as you do, my child. Herod and Salome made themselves partakers in the murder committed by the dreadful Herodias. The duty of both, in this case, was very clear. Children are indeed bound to obey their parents, but they are still more bound to obey God ; and when His commands are clear, as they were in this instance, they should respectfully decline doing what is wicked, even though they should be unfortunate enough to have parents who would lead them into sin. The same law which says, " Honour thy father and mother," says also, " Thou shalt not kill." Then as to Herod, he should have remembered that murder is still more wicked than

perjury, even could his oath have bound him to commit it. But this was impossible. He could not bind his conscience to do a wicked thing: if a man swears, he must indeed perform his oath, as the Psalmist teaches us, though it be to his own hindrance, that is, however *inconvenient*, but *not* however *wicked*. For man is already bound in conscience to abstain from all wickedness, and no oath can make him free to sin.

E. Besides, Mamma, I think Herod might have said, when he heard what Salome asked, that *that* was more than he had promised. For you know he had only said, he would give her half his kingdom.

M. You are quite right: to destroy an innocent man, and especially such a man, was more than his whole kingdom was worth; and an upright, honourable mind would have felt it so at once. But Herod seems to have acted more from a regard to his worldly character, and a fear of contempt amongst his nobles, than from any upright or honourable feelings: there was more, I imagine, of regard to the opinion of the world, than of a tender conscience, in his scruples about breaking his oath. Such was the end of the holy Baptist. He was faithful, you see, even unto death, to his great Master; faithful to his office as a preacher of repentance; and great, no doubt, is his reward in heaven. He “spoke of the testimonies of God even before kings, and was not ashamed;” and now he belongs to the glorious army of martyrs, to whom especial privileges seem to be held out in Scripture. The malice of Herodias could do no more than kill the body; it could not deprive him of the crown of life, which our Lord hath provided for those who have been faithful unto

death. A few brief moments of suffering, and then the joys which are at God's right hand for evermore. In this world the wicked are sometimes allowed to persecute the righteous; whilst the former feast, the latter are slain. But how different will it be in the next world, when those who have been put to death "for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God," shall reign with Christ in everlasting glory!

See *Matt.* ix. 27—38; x. 1—42; xiii. 54—58; xiv. 1—12. *Mark* vi. 1—29. *Luke* ix. 1—9.

THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY EVENING.

BREAD FROM HEAVEN.

M. When our Lord heard of John the Baptist's death, He took His Apostles, who had just returned from the mission on which He had sent them, and, leaving Capernaum, retired with them across the sea to a desert place belonging to the city called Bethsaida. This He did, it seems, partly that the Apostles might rest awhile after their arduous labours, for there were many people going and coming where they now were, and they had no leisure so much as to eat; partly, no doubt, to keep out of the way of Herod Antipas and the cruel Herodias, by leaving their dominions. But no sooner did the people perceive that Jesus was departing, than they proceeded by land to the same place; so that a great multitude was ready to receive our Lord as He came out of the ship. How many would have been displeased at this interruption of the little leisure which they allowed themselves, and which

was hardly enough for necessary rest and food ! How many under such circumstances would either have remained on the water aloof from the crowd, or have sought some other place where they could not follow ! But not so our blessed Saviour ! When He saw the people assembled, He was moved with compassion. He pitied their ignorance, and notwithstanding that they were intruding on His retirement, He began to teach them. They were as sheep without a shepherd, so He pitied them and became their Pastor. Although they had come at an inconvenient time, He received them, and spoke to them of the kingdom of God, and healed them that had need of healing, shewing kindness, as He always did, in regard to their bodily as well as to their spiritual ailments.

E. Then, I suppose, Mamma, we ought not to be vexed, when we are interrupted in our pleasant employments, for the sake of being kind to our fellow creatures. I suppose we ought to be glad to do good at any time, however inconvenient to ourselves ?

M. It is a most important lesson to learn, not to be ruffled when we are put out of our way ; but in all things to forget self more and more, and to be always ready to embrace every occasion of serving or obliging others. This duty will be sweetened to us, if we only recollect at the moment how beautifully and patiently the Lord Jesus performed it. Indeed how pleasant and easy might all our duties become, if we could only keep our Saviour in our thoughts continually, recollecting His lovely example which is ever before us in His word, and remembering that what He showed us how to do, He will assist us in doing.

I have already mentioned that the place where the

people followed our Lord was desert or uninhabited, and yet that the people came in a great multitude. In such a place they would be unable to procure any provisions when they wanted food; yet their eagerness kept them listening to our Lord, and beholding His miracles until the day began to wear away and evening drew nigh. Yet observe again the considerate kindness of our blessed Saviour. He would not send the poor people "empty away." He had instructed their ignorance; He had healed their diseases; and now, pitying their hunger, He would give them bread also, and prepare a table for them in the wilderness.

E. But, if the people were so numerous and the place was desert, how could bread enough be got for so many?

M. That was the very difficulty which the Apostles themselves felt: and when our Lord spoke to them on the subject, they asked if they should go and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread, to enable them to give every one a little.

E. Then how many do you suppose, Mamma, the people were? For that would not have been very much; would it?

M. Not if their penny had been like our penny; but the fact is that what is called in our English translation of the Gospels a 'penny,' was much more valuable than our present coin of that name. The Roman penny here meant, was a silver coin of more than seven times the value of our penny, and considered at that time sufficient to pay a labourer for a day's work: so that two hundred penny worth of bread would be as much as a labourer would earn by the work of two hundred days. Yet even this supply would have been scanty compared

with the numbers now to be fed ; for, without counting women and children, there were not fewer, as we afterwards learn, than five thousand men.

But you see you have forgotten, and so indeed did the disciples forget, who it was that proposed to feed this great multitude. It never seems to have occurred to their minds, that Christ could give food, as well as health ; and that He, who restored life to the dead, could also support life in the living. Is He not indeed the Preserver of men, upholding all things by the word of His power ? — the great householder of the world, who “gives us day by day our daily bread ?”

E. Yes, Mamma, I see my mistake ; Jesus could as easily feed these people with bread now, as He did the Israelites with manna so many years before.

M. Most certainly ; and yet the Apostles, and we too, have need to be taught how universal is our Lord’s power : by slow degrees, and by particular instances of every kind, they, and we, were to learn that the whole world was subject to His control ; and that God had put all things under His feet : that, as shoals of fishes came at His bidding, so would the earth as well as the sea obey His word, and food be supplied whenever, and in whatever quantity, He might wish it to be done.

E. Just as our Lord *could* have commanded the stones to be made bread, during His temptation in the wilderness.

M. He could have done it ; but then the temptation would have ceased, and the tempter’s object would have been gained ; nor would either the faith, or patience, or self-denial of our Lord have been

exhibited as they now are in that mysterious trial. Add to this, we never find our Lord working miracles for His own relief. Though He was poor and subject to many wants and sufferings, He wrought miracles only for the benefit of others. But let us return to the feeding of the multitude.

Even in His miracles our Lord would not exert His divine power beyond what was really necessary. I do not know whether you will understand me when I say that there was a wise frugality, if we may so call it, in His mightiest works. Though His power was boundless, He never exerted that power in the least degree beyond what the occasion called for. Thus in this instance, although He could have covered the ground with food as of old in the wilderness, He first asked His disciples, and bid them go and see how many loaves there might be amongst the multitude. The reply was, "five and two small fishes:" but what were they among so many? Yet this was the store out of which Christ, in His power and goodness, intended to feed the thousands who were present. So He commanded them to sit down upon the green grass, in companies of fifty each; and having blessed the bread and given thanks to God for it, He caused it to be distributed by the disciples to the multitude. And they did all eat, both of the loaves and also of the fishes, as much as they would.

E. Then, Mamma, our blessed Lord must have created the food which He gave them; for, as you said just now, the five loaves and two fishes would have been nothing to five thousand people. And have I not read that twelve baskets were afterwards filled with the pieces that were left?

M. You have. In the midst of His bounty our Lord would not suffer any waste. Though able to create inexhaustible supplies from little or from nothing, He does not chuse that we should waste His gifts. He who gives plenty forbids profusion. When He had fed more than five thousand, by that power which could as easily have fed the whole world in like manner, He added, "Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing may be lost:" and thus perhaps, by a little prudent economy, many a poor family was furnished with provision for days to come, which might otherwise have been left to become useless in the wilderness. Thus has our Divine Master instructed us by His own holy example to blend wisdom with power, and economy with generosity, that our kindness, whilst it benefits some, may cause loss to none.

E. I wonder what the people thought of that miracle.

M. When they had seen it they said, "This is of a truth that Prophet that should come into the world." Moses, as you remember, had foretold, nearly fifteen hundred years before this, that the Lord God would one day raise up from the midst of His people a Prophet, like unto Moses, to whom they should all hearken.

With much anxiety the Jews had looked forward to the fulfilment of this prophecy. When John the Baptist first appeared, they thought he might perhaps be that Prophet; and now they begin to turn their thoughts to Jesus.

E. And they were not mistaken now, Mamma?

M. Excepting that they expected too near a like-

ness to Moses ; whereas there was a vast difference in many respects between him and our Saviour. Moses was the great prince and lawgiver of the Israelites, employed by the Almighty to deliver them from Egyptian bondage, to form them into a great and powerful people, and lead them to the land of promise. Something of the same kind the Jews in our Lord's time seem to have expected from their looked for Prophet, like unto Moses. Their thoughts respecting Him were almost altogether of a worldly nature. *Temporal* deliverance was what they sighed after : temporal greatness the object of their ambition. They were now in subjection to the Romans, and seem to have supposed that, when their Messiah came, He would deliver them from that galling yoke ; would make them a free and independent people ; would raise up among them a kingdom more glorious than that of David or Solomon, and unfurl the banner of Judah from the rising to the setting sun ! So, when they saw Jesus feeding the multitude miraculously with bread, even as Moses had fed their fathers with manna in the wilderness, we are not surprised that they seemed to consider this a sign that all their hopes were about to be fulfilled.

Perhaps it was from fear lest they should at once attempt to set Him up for their king, that our blessed Lord immediately "constrained His disciples to get into the ship, and go before unto Bèthsaida," which was on the same side of the lake more to the north, whilst He sent away the multitudes, and then withdrew unperceived into the solitude of the mountain to pray. For, amidst His most laborious works, the Lord Jesus always found time for devotion. The Son of

God kept up a constant communion with the Father in heaven. No fatigue, no inconvenience, no works even of mercy, were allowed to set aside this blessed exercise. How seriously does His example call upon us to “pray always,” “to pray without ceasing!” If the Lord from heaven did not attempt to pass through this trying world without continual prayer, how should we be able to live without it! Poor helpless beings that we are—so full of sin, and so surrounded with sorrow—what would become of us, if we could not go to God, if we were not encouraged both by the precept and example of our blessed Lord, to draw near to Him continually, and seek from Him comfort, and help, and peace?

The disciples were gone, the multitude was dispersed, and Jesus remained in the wilderness alone. Perhaps the disciples wondered how He would follow them; or, supposing that He meant to walk to Bethsaida, were unwilling to go and leave their Master to bear so much additional fatigue; for there seems to have been no other vessel there at the time besides their own. But Jesus, it is said, “constrained them to go,” directing them to proceed, as we have said, towards Bethsaida. They accordingly went; but, the wind being contrary, they made but little way, not going more than three miles the whole night.

It was now the fourth watch, that is, between three and six in the morning, when they beheld some one walking upon the sea, and supposed that it must be a phantom or apparition; and they cried out for fear; for they all saw it and were troubled. But immediately a well known voice calmed their terror: it was that of their Master, who had chosen to give them

a further proof of His divine power, quite different from any they had witnessed yet, by walking to them upon the sea, and that in the midst of a storm, in which the ship in which the disciples were was sorely distressed. But away now with all their fears, either from the terrors of the sea or from the fancies which had taken possession of their own minds. The voice of Jesus is heard above the storm. "Be of good cheer, it is I; be not afraid." How well can we imagine the effect that those words must have had on the troubled hearts of the Apostles; the feeling of perfect peace, security, and confidence, which the disciples must have felt, when they found that they were not alone in their distress, but that their compassionate Saviour was present to help them;—present, not only in all His love, but in the fulness of His power, "walking on the waves of the sea." Let it be a comfort and encouragement to us as well as to them. When we get into troubles and difficulties and dangers, let us not suppose that our Saviour must of necessity be far off. He is always near His people, and especially in the time of trouble; as near them in love, and as near them in power as He ever was in the days of His flesh. Yes, the Son of God, though Himself out of the reach of trouble now, beholds His servants as they are tossed on the waves of this troublesome world, and will not allow its storms and its billows to overwhelm them. It is in the longest, darkest night of affliction that we learn by happy experience that we are not alone, that the Lord Jesus Christ is with us. It is in the storm of trouble that we learn to trust and not be afraid; to cling fast to Him who is mighty to help and to save, and amidst all the disquietudes of

our hearts, to discern that voice which never speaks in vain, saying, so that we cannot misunderstand it, "It is I; be not afraid."

But we spoke of the effect produced upon the disciples; and you will judge how they were animated by the words of Christ, when I tell you, that Peter answered and said, "Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water." So completely had he lost all fear that he could even walk over the waves himself to go to Jesus. His Lord had said, "Come;" and therefore there was no presumption in attempting to walk where never human foot had trod before. "If Jesus says, 'Come,' He means, 'I am with you, and all is safe.'" So for a moment Peter thought as he descended from the side of the ship and walked on the water to go to Jesus. "But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and, beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me." He was unable of course to keep himself up upon the waves; it was only whilst he trusted in the Saviour's divine power, that he could stand. "Whilst he believed, the sea was as firm as brass; when he began to fear, those waves were again only water."

E. But I am very glad he did not forget to cry to Jesus for help. His faith was come back to him, Mamma.

M. Taught his own weakness he is glad to trust to his Saviour's arm. Nor did he trust in vain. "Immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" Why indeed did he doubt a power which had so often, and which even now, proved itself divine? It is said in the Psalms, "The Lord

on high is mightier than the voice of many waters ;” and in the book of Job it is declared that God “alone spreadeth out the heavens and treadeth on the waves of the sea.”

But the miracles of this wonderful passage in the lake were not over. Hitherto the wind had been boisterous, but no sooner did our Lord enter the ship than it ceased ; and yet, without either wind or oars, the ship was immediately close to the shore of Genesareth on the other side of the lake, at the distance of some miles from the place where our Lord overtook them, tossed and toiling in the storm.

Great was the astonishment of the apostles : they had not considered that to Him who had just created food for more than five thousand persons, nothing could be impossible. So callous is the heart of man to the strongest evidence, until softened and enlarged by God’s heavenly grace ! It is thus that we must account for the great spiritual dulness frequently shown by the apostles before our Lord’s death ; for there were no traces of it left after His ascension, when He had sent the Holy Ghost the Comforter to shine into their hearts, and “lead them into all the truth.” But though they do not seem to have thought as much of the miracle of the loaves as they ought to have done, our Lord’s walking on the sea, and then transporting them suddenly to the other side of the lake, had a great effect upon their hearts. They came and worshipped Jesus, saying, “Of a truth thou art the Son of God.”

The next thing we come to in the sacred story is a long conversation between our Lord and the people

whom He had so wonderfully fed in the wilderness of Bethsaida.

E. But, Mamma, I thought they had all been left far behind, whilst our Saviour and His disciples crossed the lake and went to Gennesareth.

M. I am glad you observe so attentively the little circumstances of the history. You are quite right in what you say; but I must tell you that these very persons who were left behind at Bethsaida, had many of them now again gathered around Him; they had been disappointed at losing sight of Him, and in their eagerness to find Him again, had continued searching for Him until they found Him at Capernaum, to which place the blessed Jesus had gone from Gennesareth.

But I am afraid we must not take it for granted that it was simple love for Jesus that led them to be at all this trouble to find Him again. Happy indeed are those who delight in the presence of their Saviour, and seek Him wherever He is to be found.

But the Bible leads us rather to suppose that it was a worldly motive only that led these people to follow the Lord: and He, who knew their hearts, spoke to them at once according to the thoughts that were passing there: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled;" and then to draw their thoughts away from the wants of the body to the still greater wants of the soul, to raise their hopes from earth to heaven, from time to eternity, He reminded them of that food which the soul requires to nourish it to eternal life, and entreated them

to labour, not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth for ever and ever. But they still thought of the bread which Moses had fed them with in the wilderness, and which our Lord had so lately given them at Bethsaida; and in reply to His heavenly words, they said, “ Lord, evermore give us this bread.” I dare say they were disappointed at the time with His answer, though we may hope that some of them afterwards understood and valued it. For Jesus said unto them, “ I am the bread of life; he that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.” He told them plainly, that by bread from heaven, He meant, not manna, such as Moses had fed them with, not bread such as He had lately given them, but Himself, even His own precious body and blood, which He would give for the life of the world. This His disciples should feed upon, in their hearts, by faith with thanksgiving, so as to have their souls strengthened and refreshed thereby unto eternal life; a solemn and mysterious truth, which the worldly-minded cannot receive; and yet a truth of so great importance, that our Lord expressly instituted a holy sacrament as a remembrance of it. Yes; the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper was appointed for the very purpose of keeping us continually in mind of our dependence upon Christ for the life of our souls, and their nourishment continually with His body and blood, so that they may live for ever.

E. Mamma, I have learnt a little of these things in the Church Catechism, which ends, you know, with an account of the Lord’s Supper.

M. Yes; and of the benefits which those receive, who come to partake of it with penitent and believing

hearts, with thankfulness to Christ their Saviour, with love to Him and to all mankind.

May we be so taught by the blessed Spirit of God, as to be enabled gratefully to receive this precious doctrine ! May we ever frequent our Lord's table with a thankful remembrance that He died for penitent sinners, and that therefore sinners may come to Him and partake of this heavenly food, which He has spread for our souls. Let us not ask, with unbelieving hearts, as the Jews did, "How can all this be?" nor murmur as they did, because Christ offers to feed us with the bread that came down from heaven. There was in their eyes no beauty nor comeliness in a religion so spiritual, with hopes directed almost entirely to another and a better world. Sad to say, these people, who lately would have made Christ their king, began now to despise and reject Him. In vain did our Lord speak to them more and more plainly of these heavenly things : they could not understand them, they were too high for them. In vain did He direct them to that powerful grace of God, which was able to draw even their hard and obstinate hearts to Christ ; in vain did He assure them, that those, who came to Him, should be in no wise cast out. Mortified and disappointed the people turned at once away, and even many of His own disciples went back again, and walked no more with Him, saying of these blessed doctrines, that they were hard sayings which none could hear. The fact was, they began to find out what the Gospel really was. They began to see clearly that the soul, not the body, was the great object of Jesus' care, and eternal life the great blessing which He held out to them. Alas ! that they should turn away from it !

We grieve for their unbelief; and yet naturally our own hearts are just as stupid, just as dead to heavenly things, just as fond of this present evil world, as their hearts were. All by nature are alike. The blessed Jesus declares in this very conversation, "No man can come unto me, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him." We cannot of ourselves turn to God, but if we each say to Him from our hearts, "Turn thou me, good Lord; then shall we be turned." — 'Draw us, O Lord, to thy dear Son;' then will He give us grace "to run after him."

E. What did our Lord do, Mamma, when the people, and even some of His own disciples, so ungratefully left Him?

M. He turned to the chosen twelve and said, "Will ye also go away?" And blessed are those, dear Edward, who can join with their whole hearts, in the reply which burst immediately from Peter's lips: "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life; and we believe, and are sure that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God!" No doubt these were words most pleasing to the Saviour's ears; but a mournful thought crossed His mind as He heard them. He recollected that there was one even among the chosen twelve, who belonged to Satan, and not to Him. He thought of Judas Iscariot who would afterwards betray Him.

It might well make us sad too, to think that there is such a thing as living among the people of God, yet not being really one of them. Happy those whose hearts are true to their Saviour; whom the Father hath drawn to Christ; whom the Holy Spirit hath taught to discover the things which belong to their

everlasting peace ; and to prefer above all things that this world can give,—wealth, honour, liberty, power, pleasure—that eternal life, which God has given us in His Son.

See *Matt.* xiv. 13—36. *Mark* vi. 30—56.

Luke ix. 10—17. *John* vi.

THIRTY-THIRD SUNDAY EVENING.

THE TRADITIONS OF THE PHARISEES.

M. You have often heard, my dear Edward, already of the manner in which our blessed Lord was hindered in His works and labours of love by the chief people among the Jews, especially by the Pharisees.

E. Yes, Mamma ; but those Pharisees always puzzle me a little ; for they seem to have been very particular about serving God, and yet our Lord never seems to have been pleased with them. I am sure He was right ; but I do not quite understand it.

M. I do not wonder that the character of the Pharisees should perplex you ; for there was a great appearance of religion about it, whilst it was in reality very hateful in God's sight. They made a great outward show of piety, and managed in this way to get the good opinion, and indeed the high esteem of their fellow countrymen ; though far differently thought of by Christ, who knew their hearts, and did not judge of them by outward appearances. He saw that their religion was but a hollow sort of thing, appearing well outside, but not able to bear the least examina-

tion. It rested entirely in outward things; but did not improve or touch the heart. True religion, you know, purifies the thoughts and feelings, and affections of the heart; casts out every thing from within that is offensive in the sight of a pure and holy God; and thus leads to holy actions and tempers. But the hearts of these Pharisees were full of malice and wickedness, and every thing which God hates, and therefore their outward pretences to holiness were hateful and abominable in His sight. This was the hypocrisy, or acting a part before men, of which our Lord so often accused them, and which He continually exposed to view, that they might no longer deceive either themselves or others.

Such was the general character of the Pharisees; and as they were chief people among the Jews, their example must have been very hurtful to those around them. But besides this, they had fallen into one very bad and dangerous practice: they made the traditions of men of great importance, and set them up, not only as equal to, but even as far above, the commandments of God.

E. It must be very wrong, surely, to set any thing above God's word; but what are traditions of men, Mamma? I do not quite understand what traditions are.

M. I dare say not. Traditions are practices, or opinions, or sayings, not found in the word of God, but handed down from one generation to another, from man to man, from father to son. Some of these traditions may at first have come from God. This was most likely the case before the flood with all the religious ideas and practices of mankind; for at that

time there were no written communications of God's will, nor yet indeed until the time of Moses. He, you know, was the first person employed to write an account of God's dealings with men, and of His will concerning them. In these old traditions, therefore, there was some mixture of truth. Perhaps whatever ideas of religion may now be found in the heathen world, were derived at first from the traditions of the Patriarchs. But opinions and articles of faith, when communicated from one to another, merely by word of mouth, can very easily be so changed, and corrupted, and spoiled, by the folly, and ignorance, and wickedness of men, as in a short time to have very few traces left in them of what was once pure and good. Tradition was not able to preserve men from gross idolatry. Even their priests and prophets had fallen into a sad state, as we saw in the case of Balaam.

E. Oh ! yes, I remember, you told me at the time that he was a real prophet, but a bad man ; and so he was, for he was willing to do any thing, however profane or wicked, for the sake of Balak's riches ; and you know, Mamma, nothing kept him back at all, but his fear of the great power of God.

M. Thus, you see, tradition was of some use, but was easily corrupted. When, however, the Lord was pleased to set apart to Himself a peculiar people, that He might preserve the true religion in the world, He gave them something better and safer to depend upon, even His own word. This He caused to be committed to writing, first by Moses, and then by the other sacred historians, and psalmists, and prophets ; then by the apostles and disciples of our Lord.

E. And so we have got the whole word of God in the Old and New Testament.

M. And have cause to be thankful above measure, that the light was put at length upon a candlestick, where all who come into the church of God might see it. Notwithstanding there were those who still perversely clung to their traditions. Not content with the unerring teaching of God's holy word, they added to it inventions of their own, which they thought of equal or of greater authority; teaching for divine doctrines the commandments of men. Had they only used tradition to help them in understanding God's word, which it often might have done, or to enable them to keep up such ancient customs, as were innocent and useful, this would have been wise and right. But their fault was, I mean the fault of those Pharisees whom Christ reproved, that they set up tradition above the Scriptures, and used it instead of the word of God, to the great injury of the cause of truth and piety; to the great increase, also, of hypocrisy and hardness of heart.

But you will like to see how they managed to do this, and will understand the subject better, if I give you an example of the manner in which the Pharisees thus perverted the truth.

E. Pray do, dear Mamma; I always like examples.

M. The instance which our Lord gives, is a very striking one, and one in which you will be the more interested, as it relates to children. It is the duty, you know, of children to love, honour, and succour their father and mother; a duty expressly enjoined in the fifth commandment, and one which God considers

of so much importance, that He promises an especial blessing to those who observe it: not only so, He has pronounced in His word dreadful curses on those who break it; and by the law of Moses, those who reviled or ill treated their parents, were ‘surely put to death.’ An awful truth, my child! Lift up your heart then to God, whenever you hear or repeat this commandment, and say, “Lord, have mercy upon me; and incline mine heart to keep this law!”

But these clear and solemn commandments were little thought of by the Pharisees, in comparison with their own sayings and traditions, which they had received from the elders or Pharisees of former days. It was upon these they bestowed all their anxiety, though some of them were of a very trifling character, such as the washing of hands before meat, “and the washing of cups and pots, brazen vessels, and tables;” practices very desirable for cleanliness and comfort, but no where commanded by God, as a matter of religion. The Pharisees, however, made a great deal of all this; and, ever on the watch to find fault with our Saviour, they asked Him, how it was that His disciples did not attend to these things, but often ate bread with unwashen hands. Our Lord, instead of replying at once to this question, began to point out to them the dangerous use which they had made of their traditions, particularly in the case of the fifth commandment, which they had quite laid aside by the false meaning given to it in their traditions.

E. How was this, Mamma?

M. The Pharisees taught that if a person whose parents were poor, and wanted his help, liked to make a religious offering of what he would otherwise have

given to his father and mother, he might be excused from doing any thing for their comfort and support. They forgot that in the sight of the Lord "obedience is better than sacrifice," and that at any time the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord: and wicked indeed must those become, who were thus taught to harden their hearts against their own parents; who had the greatest of all rights to their affection and gratitude; especially when God himself had committed parents to the love, and reverence, and succour of their children.

But thus did the Pharisees set up a false religion, instead of the true; thus did they make even wickedness a part of piety: and many such things did they. Nor must we suppose that the Pharisees have been the only people in the world thus to pervert religion. Happy would it have been for mankind, if this sin had belonged only to them! But, alas! the same disposition has existed in all ages; even into the Christian Church it has found its way: yes, Edward, even among Christians, and amongst Protestants too, we may find numbers who think much more of their own opinions and systems than of the plain commands of God. For, without actually opposing these, they too often throw them aside, as things comparatively uninteresting and unimportant, and so, like the Pharisees, make them of none effect; not, perhaps, exactly teaching for doctrines of God the commandments of men, but often teaching for commandments of God the doctrines of men. And thus religion still, instead of being a sweet fountain of living water whose streams should purify and refresh every nook and corner of human life, becomes too often a well of bitterness, be-

side whose muddy current every thing that is lovely and of good report withers and decays.

After pointing out the great mischief which was done generally by the traditions of the Pharisees, our Lord dwelt for some time upon the matter of purifying. Now I must tell you that the Pharisees made a great deal of purifying; but then the purity which they required was altogether outward. They placed religion in clean hands and clean vessels, not in that pure and clean heart which is so blessed in God's sight. Foolish men! to think that it mattered before God, whether a man's hands were soiled or his plate not clean, or whether he ate from shining dishes, with fingers as white and fresh as the driven snow. You have often read the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. Now I dare say the Pharisees would have thought much better of the rich man clothed with purple and fine linen, and sitting down to his sumptuous feast, than of the poor beggar, who was laid at his gate full of sores. Yet happier would it have been for the rich man, to have allowed the poor Lazarus even to sit at his table with unwashed hands, and all unfit as he was for such a place, than to have left him to the pity of the dogs. Had he done something towards comforting and assisting that miserable man, he would have given a better proof that he was clean himself in the sight of God, than all the washings of the hands could ever have accomplished.

E. I think, Mamma, the Pharisees could not have felt much about the wickedness of their hearts, when they talked so much about the cleanness of their hands.

M. I am afraid they did not, my child; or they must

have forgotten what their own Scriptures from first to last would have taught them, that in man unrenewed, “every imagination of the thoughts of the heart is only evil continually.” Had they really believed this solemn truth, instead of dwelling so much on the outward washings, they would have been joining in the prayers of the royal David, and saying, “Cleanse thou me, and I shall be cleansed; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow; make me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me !” But these were the petitions of one mourning deeply under a sense of his own corruptions; not of self-complacent Pharisees. They had yet to learn what the Holy Spirit had taught him many hundred years before; and therefore our blessed Saviour told them plainly that there was nothing from without that could really defile a man. No ! if they wished to become pure in the sight of God they must turn their eyes *within*; for from within out of the heart of man come evil thoughts and tempers and passions, and all those unholy and wicked things, which make him really unclean and abominable. A melancholy, and humbling doctrine; and the Pharisees turned away from it offended. But we will not do so : we will ‘acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickednesses;’ we will cry out before God with the poor leper of old, “Unclean, unclean !” and then recollect with joy that, when he said to Christ, “Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean,” the Lord Jesus said in reply, “I will, be thou clean.” Let us have the same sense of our defilement, and the same faith in the power of Jesus to recover us from it, and we shall experience the same blessed result. The word of God which speaks to us so plainly of the

state of our hearts by nature, declares to us as plainly that "there is a fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness," that the Lord Jesus Christ is able and willing to cleanse us by His blood, and by His Spirit; and so to wash our guilty hearts, that they shall be whiter than snow.

How thankful we should be that these things have been made so clear and plain to us;—that we live in a time when even a little child may understand many a great truth, which would have been like parables and dark sayings to the wisest among the Jews! For all this knowledge we are indebted to our Great Prophet Jesus Christ. He is the Sun of righteousness who dispels the darkness of the world. He is the light as well as the life of men. In His light it is that we see light so clearly, where in old times the great and the learned groped in darkness. It is the light of the Gospel which has scattered like the morning cloud those many errors which human tradition had brought into the world. Christ has plucked up the unwholesome weeds; and planted in their stead the blessed doctrines of God's heavenly word.

We shall never think then of being proud of our superior knowledge, but trace all to the goodness and grace of God, in causing our lot to be thrown in a Christian and a Protestant country, and in a Church so scriptural, where the light shines upon us almost as soon as we are born. How thankful should we be for all these blessings! how glad that we were dedicated to our Lord Jesus Christ in Baptism; that His name was named over us, and His cross marked upon our foreheads, when we were yet unconscious infants; and that we have been instructed in the blessed

truths of His Gospel from the earliest days of childhood ! We have only to compare our lot, I say not with the heathen who “sit in darkness and the shadow of death,” but with the thousands of our fellow creatures who have been brought up in error, like the disciples of the Pharisees in our Lord’s time, or like those who belong to the Roman Catholic Church in the present day, and we shall see unbounded reason to pray to God to give us hearts more sensible of His goodness to us.

See *Matt.* xv. 1—20. *Mark* vii. 1—23.

THIRTY-FOURTH SUNDAY EVENING.

THE WOMAN OF CANAAN.

E. What are we to talk about this evening, dear Mamma? You are not going, I suppose, to tell me any more just yet about the errors of the Pharisees?

M. No, Edward; that was a subject on which it was necessary to give you some information; though I dare say it might not interest you very much. But, I have a very different matter for this evening’s conversation. Instead of the Pharisees, “the strictest sect of the Jews,” I have to tell you of a heathen person who came to our Lord to heal her daughter. For so great was the fame of Jesus, that even the heathens heard of Him, and applied to Him for relief.

E. And they came, I suppose, a great way for that purpose?

M. That was not necessary. For if you look on the map, you will see that Galilee, where our Lord

chiefly exercised his ministry, was quite to the north of the holy land, bordering upon Syria, whilst on the sea coast lay Tyre and Sidon, cities whose names you know very well.

E. O yes, Mamma, I have not forgotten Hiram king of Tyre, who assisted David and Solomon in building the temple.

M. And that, you know, was more than a thousand years before the coming of our Lord; so that Tyre was in our Saviour's time an ancient city. But it was in fact much older than Solomon's day. More than four centuries before, it is spoken of in the book of Joshua¹ as a "strong city." Sidon was older still, for Tyre was the daughter or colony of Sidon, and "the merchants of Zidon, that pass over the sea, replenished it," or supplied its wants out of their abundance, as we learn from the prophet Isaiah². It probably took its name from Canaan's eldest son, who was called Sidon, and, perhaps, built it; certainly it is one of the most ancient cities in the world. It is mentioned by the patriarch Jacob, as well known in his time³; and, in Joshua's day, was called the great Sidon, being, so to speak, the London of the ancient world, though afterwards Tyre became much the greater of the two. I was anxious to tell you all this; because Tyre and Sidon are very important cities both in ancient and modern history, and I should wish to draw your attention particularly to them.

E. I suppose they are not such great cities now, Mamma?

M. No, indeed: could you behold them now, you

¹ Ch. xix. 29.

² Ch. xxiii. 2. 12.

³ Gen. xlix. 13.

would see little to answer to the description I have been giving you. You would find Tyre a mere collection of ruins, inhabited by a few wretched fishermen ; a place, as the prophet Ezekiel foretold, twenty-four centuries ago, “for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea¹.” Sidon is also now a dirty place, full of ruins, although a great trade is still carried on there. Some travellers say, that it is pleasantly situated, and surrounded with rich gardens. The old city of Tyre had been destroyed before our Saviour’s time ; but the new one was still a place of some importance, though not what it had been in ancient times.

E. And what, Mamma, was their religion ? Was it nothing but heathenism ?

M. The Tyrians, as a people, worshipped Hercules, as he is called by the Greek writers, or Baal, as the Scriptures call him. But there were among them some proselytes, or converts to the Jewish religion. Accordingly, St. Luke tells us, that among the multitudes, which came to hear Christ, and to be healed by Him of their diseases, part were from the sea coasts of Tyre and Sidon. Mixed, indeed, with the judgments, which we find spoken in the Bible against Tyre, for its luxury and pride, are some predictions of a more gracious kind ; as in the words of the Psalmist, who foretold, that, when Christ should set up his kingdom, “the daughter of Tyre should be there with a gift :” or in the language of Zechariah, who, when he predicts the taking of Tyre by Alexander the Great, adds, “But he that remaineth shall be for

¹ Ezek. xxvi. 5.

our God." Isaiah too has said of Tyre, that "her merchandise shall be holiness unto the Lord;" that is to say, employed in His service, which is exactly what the Psalmist meant, by her being before the king with a gift. These prophecies were fulfilled in the time of the Gospel by the conversion of the Tyrians to Christianity, and the establishment among them of a Christian Church; which was at one time distinguished for fortitude under persecution, at another for the magnificence of its Christian temple. Even so early as St. Paul's time, we read¹, that he was led to tarry seven days at Tyre because he found disciples of his Master's there. But this was thirty years beyond the time of which we are now going to talk, when our Lord paid a visit to the borders of Tyre and Sidon, and met with the poor heathen woman, whose character will, I think, interest you very much.

The evangelist draws our attention to her striking story in a very marked manner, as if he felt that it deserved very particular notice. After telling us that our Lord drew near to the borders of Tyre and Sidon, he says, "And *behold* a woman of Canaan came out of those coasts."

E. I do not quite like to stop you, Mamma, just as you begin her history; but I cannot understand why she is called a woman of *Canaan*?

M. I like your question very much; for it shows that you think and attend carefully to every part of the narrative. Canaan you know was the ancient name of the whole of this country, and the woman is called a Canaanite, to show that she did not belong to

¹ Acts xxi. 4.

the people of Israel. In religion she was a Greek, or Gentile; and as to her country a Syrophenician, which was a name given to the people who lived in that part of Syria called Phenicia. This was to distinguish them from another people called Phenicians, who had settled at Carthage in Africa, and in other parts of the world, and who at this time were far better known than the Phenicians of Syria to the world in general.

E. Yes; I have read of the Phenicians in my ancient history, and I am glad you have explained to me the difference between the ancient Phenicians and the rest: for I was just beginning to feel a little puzzled about them. Now, dear Mamma, let me hear more of the woman of Canaan.

M. Our Lord had come, it seems, into the borders of Phenicia to seek retirement. He entered into a house immediately on His arrival, and wished no man to know it. "But he could not be hid;" for so great was this woman's misery, and so great her faith, that she could not be kept away from Jesus; but as soon as she heard of Him she came and threw herself at His feet, and with loud cries and most earnest entreaties implored Him to have pity upon her child, saying, "Have mercy upon me, O Lord, thou Son of David, my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil."

This was a case of human misery almost too melancholy to dwell upon, which no words of mine, I am sure, can describe, and which no heart perhaps but that of a tender parent could at all understand. Here was a miserable mother in the deepest agony of sorrow, earnestly beseeching mercy for her young daughter, who was suffering under one of the most grievous and distressing afflictions to which our fallen nature

has ever been exposed ; most likely too a widow ; for we do not hear of any father sharing her sorrow and her care ; and her daughter at that tender age, when children twine so closely about a mother's heart, perhaps because they require so much of a mother's care ; this child, this darling child, not only sick and likely to be taken away from her, but—Oh ! far worse than this !—grievously vexed with an evil spirit, unable to rest night or day, deprived of her reason, tormented to madness, in a state of such hopeless and unutterable misery, that even the mother must have been obliged to feel that death would be a merciful relief.

Such was the condition, Edward, of the person who now threw herself at the feet of the Lord Jesus to implore His compassion.

E. Oh ! Mamma, I could not bear to hear the story, if I did not know how easily our Lord could make her happy. But if she was a Canaanite and a Gentile, I wonder that she should have come to Him.

M. This is one of the circumstances which makes her history so extraordinary. She certainly had nothing in any way to do with the people of God ; she was not a Jewess, not of the family of Israel, had no share in the blessings of the chosen of God : nay more, she was still further off from God even than this ; she was a daughter of those Canaanites who had been so awfully sentenced by the Almighty, that abominable nation whom the Israelites had been ordered entirely to root out.

E. Yes ; I remember it very well : they were not even allowed to save their lives, or to suffer them to remain in the Holy Land. But, Mamma, perhaps she belonged to the family of Rahab, who, you know, feared the Lord God of Israel. Or, I will tell you

what I think : she might have been descended from those Gibeonites whom Joshua spared ; for as they lived so much with the people of God, they must have learnt something of their religion.

M. I see no occasion to suppose even this, Edward : for we are expressly told that she was herself a *Greek*, which means that she was a heathen, an idolatress ; brought up to worship she knew not what, even the images of dead men. It was, indeed, to this worst kind of idolater that the name of Greek was always given by the Jews.

E. Then I cannot understand why she came to Christ. How do you think it was ?

M. I can only suppose that, though by birth a Canaanite, and for a great part of her life a miserable and deluded idolater, she must somehow or other have been brought to the knowledge of God before she came to Jesus. We are not told how it was, but who can say that this very affliction had not been so blessed to her by God, as to produce this great change ; perhaps sent to her for this very purpose, that she might no longer bow down to wood and stone, but learn to know and love the true God and Jesus Christ whom He had sent ? This is not unlikely ; for we know that afflictions are very often sent in mercy ; that they have been in days of old, and are still very commonly the means of bringing sinners back to God.

The anguish which this poor woman underwent, as she witnessed the daily sufferings of her child, her own utter inability to relieve them, her vain applications to physicians for a cure which was beyond all human power, her incessant calls perhaps on some of her idols to help, but “no sound” in return “nor any that

answered :”—all this, so hard for human nature to bear, was administered to her in the most tender mercy by a God who knew her, though she did not know Him. It was a bitter, but most salutary medicine, which in the end should cure, not only her child’s tormented body, but her own dark and polluted soul.

And oh ! what glorious proofs did she quickly give that this great change had been wrought in her ! What astonishing faith was it the means of calling forth in that poor heathen heart ! Once persuaded in her own mind that the God of the Jews was the One living and true God, she soon went beyond the Jews, and placed her faith in Christ the Son of God whom they rejected. She saw at once that this extraordinary person, whom they reviled and despised, was no other than that promised Messiah for whom the whole nation looked, and who was now with them, though they knew Him not. She felt at once that Jesus was God as well as man, and that things which were impossible with men, were possible and easy to Him. She believed, yea, was sure that in Jesus she should find One who was able to cure her child ; and great as were the difficulties that lay between Him and her, she determined to overcome them all.

E. What difficulties, Mamma ?

M. You must remember that she belonged to the accursed people of Canaan, and had been herself an idolater. She might indeed have heard of unnumbered works of mercy performed by Jesus of Nazareth ; but who had been the objects of them ? not heathens and idolaters, but members of the family of Israel, the chosen people of God. Might she not have said, “There is no use in my going to Him, there can be

no mercy with Him for such as I am? True, there is healing for His people, even in the hem of His garment, and hope for the most hopeless, but none for a daughter of Canaan, none for a wretched outcast like me." If she had thought and felt thus, we could have understood and pitied, but not have wondered at her. But she has no need of our pity, and may well make us ashamed of our own want of faith. All this, instead of keeping her from Jesus, only made her more determined to seek His help, in the persuasion that His mercy was boundless, and that with Him there was room for all; so that no human being, however sinful or however wretched, should be sent from Him empty away. Thus her faith triumphed; and instead of seeking to hide her misery amongst her own people, or giving herself up to dreadful despair, she left the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, and boldly went forth alone to appeal to the compassion of Christ.

E. I am so glad, Mamma, that she did not allow any doubts and fears to keep her away. I feel quite sure that Christ would listen to her, even though she did belong to those wicked Canaanites.

M. Strong indeed in hope, the miserable mother approached our Lord, and told her melancholy tale. It was a tale, as we have seen, of unusual wretchedness, and likely to call forth in an uncommon degree those tender and compassionate feelings, which shine so brightly in the character of Christ. Had any thing yet been wanting to secure the gracious attention of our Lord, surely it would have been found in the unusual faith which was shown in her manner of approaching Him. "Have mercy upon me, O Lord, thou Son of David!" How extraordinary must such words have

sounded from a heathen woman's lips ! She appeals to Him as the *Son of David*, the promised king of Israel. Notwithstanding the meanness and poverty of his outward form and condition, by her He was not "despised and rejected," as He was by almost all his own people. And yet, Edward, strange to tell ! the Lord Jesus "answered her not a word." He appeared as if He heard her not, and allowed her loud and repeated cries for mercy to fall upon His ears in vain !

E. Mamma, I do not like this story at all. I can hardly believe it to be true ; it is so unlike any thing you have told me of our Saviour before. Only think, how tenderly He treated the poor widow of Nain. He did not even wait for her to speak to Him, but went and touched the bier, and made haste to give her back her child.

M. Yes, I remember it well, and many other instances of His goodness and love ; and yet it is true that Jesus took no notice of the woman who now knelt at His feet. See, it is written in the Bible, "He answered her not a word."

E. Then what can have altered Him so much, Mamma ? Ah ! I have just thought what it might be : perhaps He was very tired, and did not like to be interrupted when He had tried to find rest.

M. We have heard before of our Saviour being fatigued, Edward ; but never of his being unkind. Wearied and exhausted He might be in body ; for in all these respects he was made like unto us : but of the selfishness and fretfulness and impatience, which we so often show, no trace was ever to be found in Him. He was made like unto us indeed as to our bodily weaknesses, but of the sinful infirmities of our

nature He had no share. We must search further therefore still, before we shall find a cause for conduct which appears to us so strange and unaccountable. The disciples indeed seem to have felt as we do : for wearied with this poor woman's persevering and agonizing cries, they came and besought our Lord, saying, " Send her away, for she crieth after us ;" meaning, no doubt, to ask that He would grant her request, and send her away in peace.

E. And what, Mamma, was our Lord's answer to them ?

M. A more decided refusal of her prayer than even His silence had been. " He answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Here then was at length the answer, which she had sought so earnestly. She did not belong to the house of Israel ; she could not share in its mercies ; she must return to her poor tormented child, and watch her sufferings, with that unutterable anguish, which can only be felt by those to whom " Hope never comes, that comes to all." Her sentence has been passed ; there is nothing more left for her to do. Her faith, which has supported through all her sufferings, must fail now.

And was it thus ? Were such the feelings of the woman of Canaan ? Did she return in bitter disappointment, bewailing her hard lot, complaining that she had been born among a heathen people—a wretched outcast from Israel ; wishing in vain that she had been one of those sheep, who, lost perhaps for a little while, should be sought out by the great Shepherd and brought back to the fold for ever ! No ; she had too much faith for this ; her hopes had been

placed too firmly in the Son of David, to be easily or soon shaken off. Though He himself had spoken those dreadful words, she would try again; perhaps even now He might change them. She came therefore and worshipped at His feet, saying, "Lord, help me." Still persevering, but with the utmost reverence, she repeats her prayer. But a further trial awaited her. To her humble supplication our Lord answered and said: "It is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to *dogs*." He was sent only to the house of Israel, to heal *their* infirmities, to bare *their* sicknesses. To bestow His miracles upon the heathen would be like taking the children's bread and casting it to dogs.

E. Poor woman! I am very sorry for her: after such an answer, she will not be able to speak again. I suppose she will creep away, and hide herself in the crowd, Mamma; and we shall never hear of her again. I wish I had not heard this story. But tell me one thing more, Mamma. She did not go away angry, I hope: for you know our Lord must have been right, though He seemed unkind.

M. I am pleased to hear you reason thus: this is what we should always feel, when we do not understand God's dealings towards us; we should be persuaded that He is right, and just, and good, even when He seems most to frown upon us. But we have not yet done with the poor woman of Canaan. She is to give us further proofs of her heroic and unshaken faith, and to teach us also a lesson of deep humility, and the most enduring patience.

Our Lord's conduct to her had been marked, as as far as man could judge, with unusual severity.

When had words, like those He had just spoken to her, ever burst from His gentle lips before? “He had called her a *dog*, not a woman; He had seemed to cast her from his feet: ‘it is not meet to take the children’s bread and cast it unto dogs!’ What awful language!—children’s bread, and cast it unto dogs! Terrible distinction! The Israelites children, the Gentiles dogs!”

But you asked me whether she went away angry. How many would have done so; but not so did she. God had not indeed then revealed the wonderful mystery, which has been so clearly made known to us, that in Christ Jesus there is redemption not for Jews only, nor for Gentiles only,—but for the whole world! She knew nothing of this; yet she did not start at the dreadful distinction, which our Lord’s words had placed between her and His people—“the Israelites *children*, the Gentiles dogs!” Her faith enabled her to answer once again firmly, yet in all humility: “Truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master’s table.” What a beautiful answer was this! What a lovely example of faith, of patience, of humility!

See how gently she submits to what appears to her to be the will of God. She humbly acknowledges the immense difference between her and the people of God, willingly allows that they are the children, that she and her nation are dogs; nor does she ask *why* this is, nor presume to question the justice of what God has done. She reposes her mind in full confidence upon God; sure, very sure, that whatever He does is most wise, and just, and good, and that though she does not understand it now, she will see

clearly, by-and-bye, that it was all right. The Lord Jesus cannot lay her lower, than she is willing to lay herself, and yet whilst she brings herself to the dust, and puts herself on a level with the dogs, she will not let go her hope, that some share of His boundless mercy may yet be hers. She says, "It is true, O Lord, I am not thy child; I am as it were a dog in comparison; but still I belong to thee; I am one of the creatures of thine hand; that hand which openeth continually to 'fill all things living with plenteousness.' I am still one, though it may be a very mean one, in this great family. The dogs certainly are not children, but yet they have their share of care and kindness: the best and choicest food is provided for the children's nourishment; but they are never suffered to famish with hunger, they are often fed by the Master's hand with the fragments of His own table. Am I a dog? It is well; I murmur not that thou shouldest love the best thy dearer and worthier children; but give me still my portion, the scraps which fall from thy table."

My child, if we were to search all the volumes in the world, we should scarcely find another instance like this, of resignation to the will of God. "It is a rare example which this heathen sets, of entire contentment with His arrangements, and the best Christian may gladly imitate it. The faithful Canaanite thankfully accepts, what God is pleased to give, because He gives it; she is contented to fill a place how mean and poor! because God has chosen it for her."

I shall not dwell long on the remainder of this beautiful story. I shall make you happy enough by

telling you, in few words, how richly she was rewarded; and how fully all her confidence in Christ was justified. Yes; she was quite right. She could not trust in Him too much; she could not be too sure that with Him there was mercy for all, from the highest to the lowest and the least! She knew Him better than most Christians do! she knew that He could not be unkind! she knew that He was “just, and yet the justifier of them that believe in Him,” “a just God—but yet a Saviour,” and that there was “none like him.” Our blessed Lord had indeed tried her faith to the uttermost; but it was only that that faith, so precious, might be found unto praise, and honour, and glory in His sight, and before all who should ever hear of it.

The trial was over; and our blessed Lord condescended to reward it with peculiar approbation, and to bestow upon it an especial blessing. No doubt, the Syrophenician felt that she was more than repaid for all her sufferings, when our Lord at length turned towards her, and exclaimed, “O woman! great is thy faith! be it unto thee even as thou wilt!” when upon returning to her house, she found that the devil had gone out of her daughter, and that she was quietly laid upon the bed. Happy woman! with her Saviour’s praise still sounding in her ears, and His blessing warm upon her heart, and the child for whom she had suffered so much, restored to health and ease: what a changed place must her home have been!

E. What an interesting story, Mamma! I am sure I shall never forget it.

M. I hope not; it is very interesting and full of most wholesome instruction. The trials which this

poor woman went through, may remind us of the many afflictions and disappointments with which the best of God's children are often visited here on earth ; her beautiful conduct under them reads us a striking lesson of confidence in God's mercy, as well as patient and entire resignation to His will. It entirely forbids us to despair, it encourages us, under our heaviest sorrows, to hope still in God, to say again and again, with the sweet Psalmist of Israel, " Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me ? Hope thou in God ; for I shall yet give him praise."

E. And what should we learn, Mamma, from our Saviour's conduct to this poor woman, which seemed to me so very strange ?

M. According to our notions, the ways of God, my child, seem often strange. He tells us Himself, in His holy word, " My ways are not as your ways ; nor my thoughts as your thoughts." He who sees into the hearts of men, alone knows what is really good for them. He who can so abundantly make up to us for any trials He may see fit to send us, may often deal with us in a manner in which it would be most unbecoming in creatures like us to treat one another. Whatever He does, He does in mercy, and to make us happier in the end ; that we may enjoy more abundant peace now, and in the world to come a more exceeding weight of glory. If, for a time, He appears deaf to our prayers, it is only that He may answer them at last more bountifully, when the trial of our faith is over, as He did to the Syrophenician woman. But we must hasten to conclude our long conversation.

The daughter of Tyre, said the Psalmist, shall be there with a gift; and great were the treasures which Tyre in after times expended for the house of God: but what richer gift did she ever bring, than the faith and humility of this poor woman; her first offering to the Son of God—the first fruits of the Gospel in these coasts? Happy would it be for us Gentiles, who are no longer shut out from God's family, but heirs, together with the believing Jews of old, of the promises of the Gospel, if we had humility and faith like that which was shown by this woman of Canaan! God allows us now to sit down at the children's table, to eat the children's bread; He spreads before us the Gospel feast. O may our souls be strengthened and refreshed by it, and our hearts be full of that love and thankfulness, that confidence and submission, which God's children ought ever to exhibit¹.

See *Matt.* xv. 21—28. *Mark* vii. 24—30.

THIRTY-FIFTH SUNDAY EVENING.

FAITH AND FRAILTY OF ST. PETER.

E. Mamma, the Syrophenician woman has often been in my thoughts during the week. I think her history is almost the most interesting one you have ever told me.

M. Such instances of faith, and of the gracious rewards bestowed upon it by our divine Lord, are not

¹ In this conversation great assistance has been received from Bishop Horsley's well-known Sermons on the subject, especially in the general view of the story.

only very interesting but very encouraging. They seem to invite us to seek the same Saviour; to make Him *our* friend too; to carry *our* sorrows, whatever they may be, to Him; and to place *our* trust also firmly and patiently in His mercy. They seem to say that the Lord Jesus cannot disappoint us, and that, though He may appear to hide His face from us for a little while, it is only that He may in the end pour out upon us a more abundant blessing, and make us more completely happy. The example, indeed, of this poor heathen may well put to shame many a Christian; as it was at the time a striking rebuke to the prevalent unbelief of the Jews.

E. But were they not ashamed of their unbelief when they saw the Syrophenician worship Him, and heard even a heathen call Him “Jesus thou Son of David?”

M. I wish I could say they were: our blessed Lord indeed departed from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon and came once more to the sea of Galilee, where this gracious miracle might be unknown, even by report: He returned again to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and continued to heap fresh mercies upon them. Again He healed the sick. In multitudes they were brought to Him; “lame, blind, dumb, maimed and many others;” they were cast down at His feet, and He healed them all, so that the crowds of people around wondered exceedingly, “when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see; and they glorified the God of Israel.” Again too, He had compassion on the multitude, when they had been with Him a long time without food, and fed them by a miracle, as He had

done before Four thousand men there were, besides women and children, who did all eat and were filled, though there were but seven loaves of bread among them all, and a few small fishes. Yet immediately afterwards we are told how the Pharisees and the Sadducees came to Him, tempting Him, and desiring Him, if He were really the Christ, to give them some sign from heaven. The unreasonable demand grieved our Lord exceedingly ; so that He “sighed deeply in His spirit” and spoke in very strong terms of their perverseness and wickedness, declaring plainly that no such sign as they desired should be granted them. Nor was it only the obstinacy of His enemies, over which the blessed Jesus was compelled to mourn. Many were the sorrows which His own disciples cost Him, as they gave proof after proof of the dulness of their understandings in spiritual matters, and of the weakness of their faith. Even to them He was obliged to say, “Perceive ye not yet, neither understand? have ye your heart yet hardened? Having eyes see ye not, and having ears hear ye not, and do ye not remember?” Observe, Edward, that we may displease the Lord Jesus Christ, not only by openly turning against Him as His enemies do, but by neglecting to make a good use of the religious advantages which He gives us, so as to continue dull and ignorant in divine things, when, if we improved our opportunities of obtaining heavenly knowledge, we might become wise unto salvation, and our Lord would pour His Holy Spirit more abundantly into our hearts. That He would do so, you will feel very sure, when I tell you what He said to Simon Peter very soon after He had complained of the dulness of His disciples.

[*Second Series.*]

R

It seems that, to try the faith of His followers, or perhaps to strengthen and increase it, where He knew it to be so very weak, our blessed Lord put to each of them a very important question. For when He was come into the coasts of Cesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of man, am?" The disciples replied that there were a great many different opinions about Him; that some thought He was John the Baptist; some that He was one of their great prophets, perhaps Elijah, or Jeremiah. But a still more searching question followed this, and one more important to themselves. Jesus said unto them, "But who say ye that I am?" He knew very well that the world in general would not receive Him, but He wished to strengthen and enlighten the faith of His own disciples, that little flock whom He had gathered out of the world. He had already given them grace in some faint degree to believe in Him: they had had faith enough to leave all and follow Him; still they had but a very imperfect idea of the real character and nature of that blessed Being, who had in so wonderful a manner drawn their hearts towards Himself. Perhaps few, if any, among them had ever till now asked themselves what they really thought of their Master, and I dare say that most of them felt not a little troubled when Jesus put the question to them. One of them however, Simon Peter, answered and said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Most likely He made this answer not only in his own name but for all the others also: but however that might be, he clearly showed that he had not followed his Divine Master, seen His miracles, and heard

His words in vain ; but had become firmly persuaded in his own mind that He, who was called by some Elijah, and by others John the Baptist, was far beyond them both ;—that He was, in very deed, the Son of God. It was a great and a blessed discovery that he had made, and shewed clearly that he had been taught by God ; for none are able by nature savingly to believe in our Lord Jesus Christ. There can be no doubt about this : for as soon as Peter had declared so plainly his faith in the Son of God, “ Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona ; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.” Simon had been taught, like the rest of his countrymen, to expect, in the long promised Messiah, some great and conquering king, some glorious deliverer of the Jewish nation, who should save them from all their enemies, and make them once more a mighty nation. It must have been very difficult to lay aside all these ideas, and to believe that, in his own poor and suffering Master, he beheld the Desire of all nations, the long promised Messiah. It required great faith to believe this, and great courage to declare it so plainly ; and Peter could have obtained this faith and this courage from God only. Let us remember this, my child : we are not able of ourselves to believe in Jesus the Son of God ; so to believe in Him, I mean, as to save our souls. But He who enabled Peter to believe in the Christ, the Son of God, will put it into our power to do so too, if we seek His help : and we shall find that our Saviour has blessings to bestow upon those who are His disciples now, as well as on those who followed Him on earth.

E. And did He give Peter any particular reward for declaring so boldly his faith?

M. He did indeed pronounce a very particular blessing upon him, and gave him a striking proof of His favour. He told him, before all the disciples, that He had chosen him to be one of the most distinguished instruments in spreading His religion through the world; that he should have the great honour of first commencing to erect the Church of Christ upon earth; of laying the foundation of it so deeply and firmly, that it should stand fast, as upon a rock, for ever. How must the breast of that warm-hearted disciple have throbbed with joy, when he saw that his Divine Master read his thoughts; that He knew his love to Him, and valued it even far beyond its worth; when he heard Him pronounce those gracious words, "Thou art Peter; and on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

E. Yes, and I think you told me once before, Mamma, that the word "Peter" meant a rock?

M. I did, and it was a name, as we have just seen, suited to his character, one which he made good by the strength and firmness of his faith. That faith was placed simply and entirely on Christ "the Rock of ages," and on that rock which could never be removed, Christ was about to build His Church.

This blessed doctrine, which had just burst from the lips of St. Peter, that Jesus was "the Christ, the Son of the living God," was the great truth upon which the Church of the Redeemer was to be built. This is the foundation stone on which all the doctrines of the Gospel rest; and supported by which they shall stand fast for ever and ever. It is on this rock, my

dear child, that you and I must build our happiness both for this world and the next. If we fix ourselves here, we shall be established for ever.

E. I hope the disciples went on very happily after this: it must have been so pleasant to find that Christ approved of them.

M. Their hearts were, I have no doubt, greatly cheered by this gracious declaration from the lips of their honoured Master, and I dare say, they had little idea of the trial of their faith, which was so soon to follow. A bright gleam of sunshine had crossed their path, but the clouds were at hand, and soon gathered around them again. "From that time forth," St. Matthew says, "began Jesus to show unto the disciples how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day." The Christ must be rejected; the Son of the living God must be put to death!

E. Yes, Mamma, it must have been very sad to hear Jesus speak of all this; but then, you know, it was all to end well: so I hope the disciples did not make themselves very unhappy.

M. We, my child, know that all this *has* ended well; we are sure that all this was necessary for our salvation, and that it was done in fulfilment of prophecy. We remember that Daniel said, "The Messiah shall be cut off, but not for himself;" and that Isaiah spoke of Him as "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; bearing our griefs and carrying our sorrows, stricken, smitten of God and afflicted." But the disciples were still filled with Jewish feelings

and ideas. They were ignorant of the real meaning of their prophecies, and fully expected in their Messiah a great worldly prince, who should restore and even exalt the throne of David, and make the Jewish monarchy greater than any which had yet appeared. Full of these expectations, how little were they prepared to hear of their Master's sufferings and death ! Even Peter disappoints us now. He had been the first to acknowledge Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of the living God ; our Lord had just promised him the keys of heaven and earth ; for he was to be the first, after our Lord's resurrection, to open that kingdom to all believers, to the Jew first, on the day of Pentecost, and also to the Gentile, as we read in the interesting account of Cornelius in the tenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. Yet even Peter, so forward, so distinguished among the disciples of Christ, was at this time so ignorant of the real nature of that kingdom, that, when he heard our Lord talk of sufferings and death, " he took him and rebuked him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord ; this shall not be unto thee." His words sprang no doubt from affection to our Lord, and an earnest zeal for His honour. But our purest affections may be mistaken, and may sometimes lead us astray. And thus on the present occasion did Peter's zeal and anxiety lead him to offend his Master. We can hardly find severer words in the whole of His history, than those which fell from the divine lips of the Redeemer in His answer to Peter's speech. " He turned and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan ; thou art an offence unto me ; for thou savourest not the things which be of God, but those which be of

men." It was no doubt Satan, the great enemy of our souls, that put this thought into the heart of Peter; for Satan would have been very glad if Christ could have been persuaded to shrink from those bitter sufferings, which were to finish the work of our salvation. Jesus knew this, for He read Peter's thoughts, and saw how mistaken his notions were at this time, how worldly, how much more pleasing to the earthly and corrupt inclinations of men, than to the holy and heavenly will of God. The severity of our Saviour's language on this occasion to His own disciple, should lead every one of us to watch carefully over our deceitful hearts. It should teach us to suspect our motives and affections, and to guard carefully against the love of this wicked world with its pomps and vanities, which at our baptism we have all promised to give up.

So greatly did our Saviour feel the danger we are in from these things, that He did not rest at the solemn rebuke which He had just given to Peter; but called all the people to Him, and told them plainly that, if any would be a follower of Him, he must be ready to give up, not only the world, but even his own life. He must consider the life of his immortal soul, more than that of his perishing body; he must set his affections on another and a better world, and look constantly forward to that great and solemn day, when the Son of Man shall come in the glory of His Father.

For glorious He is, and a King He is! Yet His kingdom is not of this world: nor His glory that of an earthly monarch, confined and short lived; but the glory of an everlasting kingdom in heaven; the divine glory of the Father and of the Son. The Son

of God came into the world, not to establish an earthly empire; He became incarnate, but it was to suffer and to die.

See *Matt.* xv. 29—xvi. 27. *Mark* vii. 31—viii. 38.

Luke ix. 18—26.

THIRTY-SIXTH SUNDAY EVENING.

THE TRANSFIGURATION.

M. Do you remember, Edward, under what circumstances we left the disciples of Christ last Sunday evening?

E. Yes, Mamma; and I was, I know, very sorry for them: I think our Saviour's last words must have made them very unhappy.

M. I have no doubt that their hearts were full of sadness. By nature we all shrink from sorrow and suffering; and the picture our Lord had drawn of His future path was dark and gloomy indeed: we do not wonder that they did not like to contemplate it. But do not suppose for a moment that we feel more for the poor downcast disciples than Jesus their Master did. Do not imagine that we are more given to pity than He was; nor think, because He spoke a few words of solemn rebuke to a disciple who allowed his love to his Master to lead him to offend and grieve Him by foolish words, that therefore He made no allowance for their feelings. Never suffer yourself to entertain hard thoughts of Christ. Rest assured that the more you know of this Divine Saviour, the more you will

find that He is a God of all pity and consolation ; that He knows our infirmities, and remembers that we are but dust, and that even in His wrath He thinks of mercy. We shall have a striking proof of this in the narrative now before us.

He had spoken to His disciples of the bitter sufferings and death that lay before Him ; but immediately afterwards He lifted their thoughts far above this scene of sorrow, and led them on to the time when the Son of man should come again in the glory of His Father with all His holy angels with Him. And then, as this glorious prospect was far distant and He knew that the hearts of His disciples were much discouraged, He was pleased to have compassion upon them. Lest their hearts should utterly faint and grow sick through hope deferred, He vouchsafed not merely to assure them, in words, of His greatness, but to promise that He would make it known to their very senses.

E. I am so glad that the Lord Jesus seems to have forgiven them, and that He is going to make them happy again. Go on, dear Mamma, and tell me how it was.

M. Here is the Bible ; read for yourself these cheering words : “ And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, that there be some standing here which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.” Though He was to be persecuted, to be rejected, to be slain, yet there were those in that very company, who should before their deaths behold the success of His religion, the triumph of the Gospel kingdom, and the destruction of its enemies. St. John for instance lived not only to see the

religion of Christ established ; but to behold Jerusalem for her unbelief destroyed.

E. Did he really, Mamma? And was this what our Lord meant by saying, that they should not taste death till they had seen the Son of man coming in His kingdom?

M. This was not all. A few days after this our Lord gave to three of those disciples, that were now standing round Him, such a display of His glory, as was sufficient to drive away every doubt from their minds ;—sufficient to make them sure that His kingdom should triumph at last, yea though it did pass first through every kind of opposition and suffering.

E. I think I know now what you are going to tell me about. Is it not what is called the Transfiguration of our Lord? You know we had that beautiful chapter, a little while ago, in our morning readings with you in the Bible.

M. It is that glorious event, which we are going to consider to-night. Turn to the 9th chapter of St. Luke, and read from the 27th to the 35th verse.

“ But I tell you of a truth, there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God. And it came to pass about an eight days after these sayings, he took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray. And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistening. And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias : who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem. But Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep : and when they were

awake, they saw his glory, and the two men that stood with him. And it came to pass, as they departed from him, Peter said unto Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here : and let us make three tabernacles ; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias : not knowing what he said. While he thus spake, there came a cloud, and overshadowed them : and they feared as they entered into the cloud. And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son : hear him."

E. What a wonderful account, I should like you to explain it all to me. But, dear Mamma, should you have any objection to tell me first a little about the mountain, where this happened? I think I should understand it better, if I could fancy it a little, and see the spot upon the map.

M. I should be glad to do this; for I like you as much as possible to form a picture in your own mind of every scene that I relate. It is generally thought that the mountain here spoken of was Mount Tabor in the tribe of Zebulon—"A very high hill," Josephus tells us, "thirty furlongs high, that is nearly four miles, and so steep that some of our English travellers, that wished to climb it, have been glad to stop half way up, content to look at the remainder of it with their eyes." It is very distinctly pointed out in the maps of the Holy Land, which we have so often examined together. A celebrated traveller has told us that it is a high mount, round and beautiful, standing by itself in the plain of Esdraelon, at a short distance from Nazareth towards the east. It seems from his account that the summit was quite flat; even so as to form a large plain, fertile and delicious, and shut in with trees on

all sides but that towards the south. From this there was an extensive view of the "land flowing with milk and honey."

E. Now I shall fancy the history better. Mamma, I was thinking as I read those verses to you, how good it was of the Lord Jesus to allow Peter to be one of the three who saw these glorious things. I see now that He is very ready to forgive.

M. It is indeed a remarkable proof of our Lord's compassion for the errors of His disciples, that Peter should be the first among the three who were chosen to see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom,—to behold Him already in His royal majesty. Nor did the favoured Apostle ever forget the lesson which he now learnt. Long after this he speaks of it as a most convincing proof of Christ's glory. You will see, if you turn to his Second Epistle, that he says to the Churches to whom he wrote, "We have not followed cunningly devised fables when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ; but were *eye-witnesses of his majesty*. For He received from God the Father glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' And this voice, which came from heaven, we heard, when we were *with Him in the holy mount*."

Here then our Lord began to fulfil His promise, that He would exhibit, to some then present, proofs of His kingly power, even before they should taste of death. Now we begin to understand what He then meant. On the mount of transfiguration He made them, as St. Peter says, "eye-witnesses of his majesty." Great, you know, were the trials to which

their faith was ere long to be exposed; but firm were the grounds on which it was to rest. Should it ever for a moment be shaken, how would one thought of that excellent glory strengthen and refresh it! Consider what a wonderful sight it must have been!—the person of Christ transfigured, and the fashion of His countenance altered, so that His face did shine as the sun: whilst even His garments, so poor and mean, became exceeding glorious. The Evangelists seem as if they could not find words to describe the brightness of their appearance. One says, “His raiment was white and glistering,” like lightning; another, that it “became shining, exceeding white as snow, so as no fuller on earth could white them;” a third, that “it was white as the light.” What then must be our Lord’s glory in heaven, if a glimpse of it upon earth was so overpowering!

And there talked with Him two men Moses and Elias,—individuals who had once dwelt among the trials and sorrows of this mortal life, and endured affliction with the people of God: but they too appeared now in glory. The servants of Christ are glorified as well, though not so much, as their Master. Even their bodies are sacred, and safe in the care of God. You may remember that neither of these highly favoured individuals had departed life in the usual way. Moses had died alone in the mount; and none of his friends were permitted to take charge of his earthly remains. They were not allowed to lay them with honour in the grave, and they might have feared that they were destroyed for ever: but the Lord buried Moses; the Lord preserved the remains of His faithful servant, and he now ap-

pears more glorious far than when he once came down from the mount after conversing so long with God. Here is sweet consolation for those who are obliged to lay their loved friends in the dust, and give up those forms so precious in their sight, to become the food of the loathsome worm. Though mortal, they have not perished for ever, but shall spring up again from the dust, only infinitely more glorious for this temporary defilement. "Right dear in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." Nor had Elijah's chariot of fire guided him amiss: hidden, it soon was, from mortal sight, but only by clouds of ineffable glory: it had borne him safely to the bosom of his God; from whence he had now come, for a little moment, to minister to the consolation and honour of the Son of man.

E. I wonder whether there was any other reason why Moses and Elijah should have been the chosen two to appear with our Lord upon the mount?

M. Perhaps because Moses had been the giver of the law, and Elijah the chief of all the prophets. Their appearance now reminds us, how the law and the prophets both led to Christ, and how both were to be accomplished and fulfilled in Him. Add to this, both Moses and Elijah were distinguished servants of God in very trying times; and we know where it is said, "They that honour me I will honour." In this world the servants of God may often be in heaviness through manifold trials; but when Christ our Lord shall appear again in glory, we too, if we cleave to Him now, shall be like Him, and shall see Him as He is, more glorious still than when He manifested Himself to His disciples on the mount of transfigura-

tion. How should the knowledge of His glory, and the hope of being glorified with Him, support and animate us under the transient trials of this world, however severe they may sometimes be ! How must the glimpse of heaven's glory, which was granted to these three disciples, have encouraged them, and through them, all the rest of His followers, notwithstanding what our Saviour had said of His approaching sufferings ! How sure must it have made them feel of that resurrection of which He had also spoken ! They saw now how great and glorious in Himself their Divine Master was, however He might submit for a time to reproach, and suffering, and death ; they had a visible manifestation of His royal, His divine " Majesty."

E. You said, Mamma, that Moses and Elijah talked with Christ. I wonder what they talked about ?

M. What indeed, my child, in the midst of all this glory was the subject on which these glorified saints conversed ? It was none other than that which occupies the redeemed spirits around the throne of God for ever. " They spake of his decease, which he should accomplish at Jerusalem." The Law and the Prophets together testify of Christ. They point continually to the redemption which the Messiah should accomplish for a fallen world. They speak of His triumphs over the enemy. They speak too of His death. Such had formerly been the best part of the office of Moses. Such too had been the great object of the prophets, of whom Elijah was the chief. And now on the mount of Transfiguration they read us the same lesson ; " they speak of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem." In the midst

of His glory they spake of His death ! They speak of it as the foundation of all their glory, as the sacrifice to which they are indebted for the blessings, as we are for the blessed hopes, of heaven. St. Chrysostom a most holy and eloquent writer whom Papa will teach you to read and to love, I hope, some day, has remarked that Christ never spake of His sufferings but after some great miracle, and our own excellent Bishop Hall has some very beautiful thoughts on this subject. He says, "A strange opportunity to talk of His passion ! In His highest exaltation to speak of His sufferings, to talk of Calvary on Tabor ! When His head shone with glory, to tell Him it must bleed with thorns ! When His face shone like the sun, to tell Him it must be spit upon ! When His garments glistened with that celestial brightness, to tell Him they must be stripped and divided ! When He was seen between two saints, to tell Him He must be seen between two malefactors. In a word, in the midst of His divine Majesty, to tell Him of His shame, and whilst He was transfigured on the mount, to tell Him that He must be disfigured upon the cross. Yet these two heavenly prophets found this the fittest time for this discourse ; choosing rather to speak of His sufferings in the height of His glory, than of His glory after His sufferings." And so it is good for us in the midst of happiness, to remember that sorrow may come : in the midst of health, to think of sickness : in the midst of life, to think of death ! It was good for the Apostles, even on the mount of Transfiguration, to hear still of those sufferings which Christ had already spoken of in the plain below.

Whilst this wonderful conversation was going on, the disciples “were heavy with sleep,” overcome, perhaps, with the heavenly glory of our Lord, or giving way to the weakness of the flesh which too often causes men to slumber amidst the most solemn and animating subjects. But awaking, at length, they saw the glory of Christ; and beheld the two men standing with Him. It was not a dream, but an open vision. It appeared not to one of them only, like those apparitions which men sometimes, when their minds are out of order, may fancy that they see; but they all saw the glory and the two men standing with Christ. Peter, James, and John, were each of them eye-witnesses of His majesty. ‘In the mouth of three witnesses is this truth established.’

“Then answered Peter, and said, Lord, it is good for us to be here: and if thou wilt let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias, not knowing what he said.” Amazed and yet entranced at what he beheld, Peter desired to remain on Mount Tabor; he felt that it was indeed “good for them to be there:” and so far he was right; for what can we imagine to be more full of ravishing comfort and satisfaction, than such communion with the saints, especially with the presence of Christ among them. But when he purposed to erect there three tabernacles, one for Christ, one for Moses, and one for Elijah, he did indeed show that “he knew not what he said;” as if Moses and Elias were equal to the Redeemer! as if the law and the prophets could be separated from Christ! No; there is only one tabernacle; only one holy catholic Church; only one house of God, in which Christ is Lord, and in

which Moses and the prophets think it their chief glory to have been faithful as servants to the Son of God: as St. Paul says in his epistle to the Hebrews, when speaking of the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus, that "he was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house." But on this occasion St. Peter was carried away with amazement, and "wist not what he should say;" and while he was yet speaking "unadvisedly with his lips," consulting, as he thought, for the glory of Christ, yet not exalting him above glorified men, "a bright cloud overshadowed them; and, behold, a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." Moses was a lawgiver, Elias was a prophet; both illustrious in their time and place; but our great Prophet, our great Lawgiver, is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. For "God who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed Heir of all things; by whom also he made the worlds." Him must we attend to, above all other teachers. "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy; of how much more punishment shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God?" "How then shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation, which at first began to be spoken by the Lord himself." Let us never then forget the words which the apostles heard in the holy mount; "This is my beloved Son; hear *Him*." Great was the glory already described, in which our Lord appeared with His two faithful servants, Moses

and Elias. But greater still was that, which accompanied the sound of the heavenly voice. St. Peter, speaking of it in his epistle, calls it the excellent glory, or as the word might, I believe, be still more closely rendered, the magnificent, the majestic glory; the glory of the Divine Majesty. No sooner indeed did the disciples hear this Voice, than they fell on their faces and were sore afraid.

E. Just as the prophet Daniel did, Mamma, when he saw that great vision which God revealed to him.

M. Yes, he tells us himself, “there remained no strength in me; and when I heard the voice of his words, then was I in a deep sleep on my face, and my face towards the ground.” Isaiah too was filled with the like dread when he saw, as St. John teaches us, the glory of the Son of God. Then said he, “Woe is me, for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts,” the same King, whose glory the disciples now behold on the mount of transfiguration, where they too sunk on their faces, overcome with the divine majesty. For even glory, far more heavenly glory, is too much for weak man to bear. Our fallen nature shrinks from it. “Then Jesus came and touched his disciples, and said, Arise, be not afraid.” He it is that supports His followers under the trials of the Christian life, and prepares them also for its rewards. Heaven itself, my child, with all its overwhelming happiness, would be an object of dread rather than desire, to the human heart, if it were not renewed by the Spirit of God: if it were not “touched” as it were with strength from on high to bear that

‘exceeding weight of glory,’ which is “about to be revealed” hereafter.

The glorious vision was now ended. The heavenly visitants were gone. The disciples had seen enough to convince them of the majesty of Christ, their Lord and Master, notwithstanding all the sufferings which He had condescended to undergo, and His ignominious decease, which according to what both the Law and the Prophets had spoken, He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. “And when the three disciples had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man any more, save Jesus only, with themselves.”

E. Then Moses and Elijah were gone again! I dare say the disciples wished they could have kept them with them.

M. Jesus was still with them, and having Him how could they want any thing more? “In his presence there is fulness of joy.” If *He* had gone, they might indeed have been miserable, even though Moses and Elijah had both remained. For no created being can make up for Christ. “It matters not much who is away, if Christ be with us.” His presence could at any time make this cold earth seem like heaven; and heaven without Christ would be no heaven to those who love Him as they ought.

But there is another lesson taught us by the Son of God on this great and glorious occasion. It is this—heavenly privileges, the important truths, the bright hopes, the blessed comforts of religion, must not so occupy our hearts as to draw us away from our daily duties in life. Nay, even the raptures of devotion, those glimpses as it were of celestial glory, must not hinder us from performing the important duties which

God has marked out for each one of us in this world : they should rather refresh and strengthen us, and prepare us for still greater exertions in the path appointed us. Let us observe our Lord's example in this respect.

Behold His continued activity in doing good. See how He returns with a steadfast heart to the trials and duties of life. Scarcely has He reached the foot of Mount Tabor, than He begins again that course of miracles, that ministry of blessings, in which we have so long seen Him engaged. As He left His glory in heaven to come down to labour, suffer, and die for us, so He now leaves His glory in the holy mount, and enters at once upon His labours of love for a faithless and perverse generation. The sacred historians conduct us again throughout Galilee, to witness with them His Almighty power, His amazing miracle

Nor is this all. Our Saviour is a glorious King : He had shewn Himself such at His transfiguration : by His miracles He had given clear evidence that He was the Lord of whom the prophet had said, " Behold the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple." He had shown that He was not a servant in the Church of God, like Moses and Elijah, but the Son of God, having authority over His own house. Yet to Him did the persons appointed to collect the public tribute money, come to demand the offering which every Israelite was required to pay towards the services of the temple. With this demand of course our Lord had nothing to do, because He was Himself the Lord of the temple ; and so He told His disciple Peter, when the people asked him, whether his Master did not pay tribute. Yet rather than cause offence, He gives up His own right, and humbly, and peace-

ably pays for Himself as well as for Peter, the accustomed offering. Nay He even works a miracle on purpose: for He desired Peter to go to the sea, and cast an hook, and to take up the fish that first came; assuring him that, when he had opened his mouth, he should find a piece of money sufficient for them both.

Who could believe that this was the same glorious person, whose Majesty Peter had so lately beheld; and to whom the voice from heaven had spoken, when it said, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased?”

This union of the highest greatness with the lowest humility, of unlimited power with submission to unexampled suffering, of the most entire heavenly mindedness with unwearied activity in well-doing, of our Lord’s consciousness of a heavenly kingdom, while He paid tribute as a common Israelite—how full of instruction is it all to us! How much more should we be humble who are not great! How much more should we be ready to suffer patiently the troubles which we cannot avoid! How active should we be in our duties who hope for glory, and how willing to submit to that authority which has indeed a full and rightful claim upon us!

See *Matt.* xvii. *Mark* ix. 1—33. *Luke* ix. 27—45.

THIRTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY EVENING.

RESURRECTION OF LAZARUS.

M. We have seen already, Edward, what sort of reception our Lord met with at Jerusalem, and how determined the Jews were in general not to receive Him

as the Christ. I am sorry to tell you that the very same treatment met Him when He again at two different times visited the holy city : for the Jews on both occasions took up stones to stone Him, and that, in the Temple. Even that holy place could not shelter Him from their violence, because He called Himself the Son of God. They considered it as blasphemy against the most high God to say this : and so indeed it would have been, had it not been *true*, and been proved to be true by the wonderful works which our Lord continually performed. Great, however, was the rage of the Jews—but a second time, Jesus escaped out of their hands.

E. Where did He go now, Mamma ?

M. He went again beyond Jordan, to the same place where John had baptized, and had pointed out Jesus to the people as the Lamb of God.

But though our blessed Lord thought fit to leave that unhappy city for a time, in order to preserve His life, He did not hesitate to return again to its neighbourhood as soon as He heard that there was an act of mercy to be performed there.

It seems that at a village called Bethany, about two miles from Jerusalem, lived a family whom Jesus valued very much. They were two sisters called Martha and Mary, with their brother Lazarus, who were all three very dear to Jesus ; so much so, that He often honoured their house with His presence, and blessed them with His friendship. It was for the sake of this family that Jesus ventured to approach Jerusalem again.

E. Was there any thing the matter with them then, Mamma ?

M. Yes; Lazarus was sick. Those who are dear to God, are not therefore safe from sickness and suffering. Nay, they sometimes on that very account are subjected to severe trials, that God may "do them good in their latter end;" that He may have more glory, and that they may be made more happy. Lazarus, whom Jesus loved, was sick. And his sisters sent unto Him, saying, "Lord, he whom thou lovest is sick."

E. How happy they were to have such a friend, Mamma! I dare say they felt quite sure that He would come directly and make him well.

M. No doubt they did; and no doubt they were much surprised and disappointed, when hour after hour, and day after day passed by, and Jesus did not come. But so it was. When Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick, He did not hasten to his bed-side, but abode two days still in the same place where He was. This seems strange at first sight to us, and St. John, who relates the story, as if he thought this sounded unkind, tells us again, that "Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus." But afflictions are often the best proofs we could have of Jesus' love to us. Few, however, are inclined to think so; and I dare say the hours rolled by very heavily in the sick room of Lazarus. I dare say the anxious sisters looked on very impatiently for some signs that Jesus was coming; and wondered, I have no doubt, that one who had seemed to love them so well, should be absent from them in this time of trouble. Could they have heard what the Lord had said, when the message was first brought to Him, their minds would have been more at ease. For when Jesus heard the message which

they sent Him, He said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God; that the Son of God might be glorified thereby."

Well, indeed, can we imagine the distress of those affectionate sisters, as they hung over the sick bed of their only brother, and saw him get worse and worse, when they began to have less and less hope that Jesus could be there in time. Some hope, no doubt, they had to the very last that He would still be with them before it was too late: but all in vain. Their brother Lazarus died! And Jesus was still afar off; at least so these sad sisters thought; but it was not really so. Oh no! "Jesus heard the very first groan of His dear Lazarus; He counted every breath he drew, every sigh he gave. And He allowed him to sicken, and languish, and die," only to show how mighty He was, even at the last, to save.

E. Then Jesus did really allow Lazarus to die? I did not expect that, Mamma. I fancied that He was only trying their faith a little, and that He would soon appear to raise him, as he had done others, from his bed of sickness. And yet you say that Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus?

M. The word of God tells us so, and I can quite believe it. Indeed I should be very unhappy, if I did not believe that our severest afflictions in this world are often sent in tenderest love. I have often felt thankful that the Spirit of God had caused to be recorded so simply, so minutely, this beautiful and affecting history: for it is full of comfort and instruction for the time of trouble. Here I see three persons beloved by our blessed Saviour, allowed to be His intimate companions and friends, yet permit-

ted by Him to be plunged into the deepest affliction. One of them is laid low on the bed of sickness, and allowed even to pass through the dark valley of the shadow of death: the other two are even more severely tried, for they have to lay what they love best in the cold grave. Why then should we be alarmed when trouble overtakes us? Why should we be surprised, as though some strange thing happened to us? Why should we despair of comfort and deliverance even from under the heaviest evils? We have only to go on further in this wonderful narrative, and we shall hear of a compassionate, and almighty Saviour, who knows all that happens to us, who appoints it all, who is never in reality nearer to us, or more careful of our happiness, than when He appears to be farthest off and to care least about it; and who in the very moment, when we think it is too late for His help, may be on the point of appearing for our deliverance.

You shall see now in what way the story assures us of all this.

E. You said, dear Mamma, that our Saviour stayed two days where he was, after He heard that Lazarus was sick: did He go to Bethany when those two days were ended?

M. Yes; after they were passed He said to His disciples, "Let us go into Judea again." They tried hard to persuade Him not to go, saying, "Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee; and goest thou thither again?" But our Lord told them that, whilst life lasted, it must be employed in doing our duty, whatever that may be; and that the path of duty is the path of real safety. He then explained to His

disciples why He was going into Judea again, saying to them, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep."

"What a sweet title does Jesus give here, both to death and to Lazarus! Death, a sleep; Lazarus, our friend."

E. Then, Mamma, Jesus called death only a sleep. I remember learning, when I was quite a little child, "When I die, I shall go to sleep for a very long time;" but I did not know then, that the Lord Jesus had taught us this.

M. Yes; it is our blessed Saviour Himself who has given us this happy view of death. We are apt to look upon it as an enemy; but it may prove a friend. To the just it is only a sweet and undisturbed sleep, from which they will wake up joyfully in a better world. "Who is afraid, after the weary toils of the day, to take his rest by night? or what is more refreshing to a weary traveller than a sweet sleep?" But men do not generally look upon death thus; even His own disciples could not understand His words; they replied, quite ignorantly, "Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well:" for they thought He was speaking "of taking of rest in sleep." But the sleep of Lazarus was deeper than this—a repose, from which nothing but the voice of Jesus could awaken him! Then Jesus told them plainly that Lazarus was dead.

When our Lord was come to Bethany, Lazarus had been already four days in the grave; and as Bethany was so near Jerusalem, many Jews had come from thence to do what they could to comfort Martha and Mary.

E. That was very kind of them.

M. It was indeed; for in the sympathy of friends there is great comfort. The Bible bids us to “weep with those that weep,” to share the sorrows of our fellow creatures, if by so doing we may divide and lessen them. Though God is Himself the great source of all comfort, yet it pleases Him that we should in some degree lean upon, assist, and comfort one another. These sisters therefore did not shut their doors against their Jewish friends: they received their sympathy, no doubt, very gratefully; though they felt all the time, that there was one Friend still absent, who could have done more to comfort them, than all the rest. One word, or one look from Him, would do more to heal their hearts than all the world beside.

E. And He was coming now, Mamma.

M. Yes; the worst was over now; the Lord Jesus Christ approached; and when Martha heard that He was coming, she went out to meet Him, assured in her heart that He could not only sympathize, but succour too. And so she told our Saviour, saying to Him, the moment she saw Him, “Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died; but I know that, even now, whatsoever thou shalt ask of God, God will give it thee.” Nor did she expect too much. Her faith had been sorely tried; it was now to be rewarded. For Jesus did not keep her one moment in suspense; He said unto her, “Thy brother shall rise again:” and when Martha replied, “I know that he shall rise again at the resurrection in the last day,” He said to her very plainly, “I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me,

shall never die. Believest thou this? She said unto him, I believe that thou art the Christ the Son of the living God." As a Jewess, you see Martha believed in the resurrection of the body; yes, she believed the glorious truth, that "this mortal shall put on immortality." But she believed still more than this; she believed in Him, who is the resurrection and the life; through whom the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting, are secured to man. Such did Jesus declare Himself to be; such was He now about to prove Himself.

After hearing the encouraging words of Christ, and receiving into her heart the rich consolation which He gave her, Martha went to communicate the good news to her sister; to tell Mary that Jesus was come. All unconscious of the blessing which was so near, she was sitting in the house among the mourners; herself the chief of them; but no sooner did Mary hear of the approach of Jesus, than she arose quickly and went to Him. In the depth of their distress, their hearts still turned to their heavenly Teacher. Affliction had not soured them; it had not driven them from Christ. Rather it had drawn them nearer to Him. In the multitude of the sorrows which they had in their hearts, they felt that His comforts could refresh their souls; they made haste into His presence.

Our Lord seems to have remained still in the same place where Martha had met Him. Then Mary, in the depth of her grief, but as humble as she was afflicted, threw herself at our Saviour's feet, and addressed Him in the same touching words that Martha had used before. "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother

had not died." And when she had said this, her tears burst forth afresh.

Mary wept; the Jews who followed her wept; and when Jesus saw them all weeping, He himself "groaned in his spirit and was troubled," and said, "Where have ye laid him?" And then, as He followed this mourning party to the grave, Jesus himself wept. Being truly man, he partook of our sorrows, and could weep for pity, as he wept over Jerusalem;—could weep from affection, as He wept for Lazarus.

Then said the people who surrounded Him, and beheld all that was passing, "Behold how he loved him!" Well might they make this exclamation; for, behold here "love stronger than death: behold here a friend whom the very grave cannot sever. Oh! how greatly does the love of Christ surpass all human affection! Our earthly friends may follow us to the grave; but there they must leave us to the worms and the dust. But the grave stone, the earth, the coffin are no boundaries to the Saviour's love." Those whom He loves, He loves to the end. Even the very dust of His saints is dear to Him: there, even there, He considers them as members of His own body. "Heaven and earth yield no such friend as Jesus. O how shall we joy to think that the time is coming when He shall come to every one of our graves, and call us up out of the dust! When we shall hear His voice and live."

E. I suppose Mary and Martha began to have some idea of what our Lord was going to do, when they saw Him go towards the grave?

M. No, I think not. There seems to have been no idea yet of the miracle which He was about to

work, even in the minds of Martha and Mary. They thought, and so did the Jews, that He might have saved Lazarus from dying; but they seem never to have imagined that He could raise him from the dead. I suppose they thought that He came to the grave merely to weep.

E. I wonder Martha did not expect Jesus to raise Lazarus to life again after what He had said to her.

M. It seems that she had but half understood His words; for when our Lord was come to the grave, and had ordered the people to roll away the great stone that was put at the mouth of the sepulchre, Martha tried to persuade Him not to have this done. She told Him that Lazarus had been dead four days, and that the body must already be passing into a state of corruption, and therefore not fit to be approached, even by those who loved Him best! So much does the power of God and his mercy too exceed all that we can ask or think! He had told Martha that, if she believed, she should see the glory of God. But this she had forgotten. Great was her faith, but it still came far short of the glory of God. Nevertheless they took away the stone from the sepulchre at the Lord's command. "And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I know that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stood by, I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me. And when he had thus spoken he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth!"

E. Why, Mamma, Jesus spoke to Lazarus as if He were alive, not dead!

M. To let us know that those who are dead to us are

alive to Him. Why then should we fear that separation which is to unite us to our Saviour? Lazarus, come forth!" "That is the voice that we shall one day hear sounding in the bottom of our graves, and raising us out of the dust! That is the voice that shall pierce the rocks, and divide the mountains, and fetch up the dead out of the lowest depths." May we hear that voice with joy! Lazarus heard it "and came forth, bound hand and foot with grave clothes; and Jesus said unto them, Loose him, and let him go."

E. What must Mary and Martha, and what must Lazarus have felt!

M. Far more each one of them than we can imagine. It would be impossible for us to understand their feelings; unless, like them, we had laid what we loved in the grave, and had it suddenly restored to us again; unless, like Lazarus, we had felt what it was to put off this mortal body, and then at the command of Christ to come back to it again. The Evangelist does not attempt to describe the various emotions that must have filled the hearts of these three highly favoured servants of our Lord. He tells the extraordinary tale, and leaves it, in salutary silence, to work its own effect on our minds, And shall it not, by God's grace, influence those minds? Shall it not lead us to think seriously of that time when we too must lie down in the grave? Shall it not help us to believe in that Saviour, whose voice shall one day too wake us, as He now awoke Lazarus? Shall we not remember with joy that He is the resurrection and the life, not only to Lazarus but to all that believe in Him? Yes, He will raise these bodies of ours, not indeed after four days, but after hundreds

it may be thousands, or even millions, of years. No lapse of time can make the thing impossible to Christ. He will raise us, not to return again to this world of trouble, and sin, and death, but, if we really believe in Him, and live now as His disciples, to enjoy life everlasting; not in a corruptible body like that of Lazarus, but one incorruptible and glorious, springing from the buried body like a beautiful plant from a homely seed, which, like the body, is buried and decays, before it rises again to a new life under a far more noble form.

Thus, my child, the history of the resurrection of Lazarus should lead us to think of and prepare for that more wonderful and glorious and happy resurrection, which awaits the true followers of Christ in the world to come. Lazarus rose to die again, and meanwhile to suffer, perhaps to sin; but those who are counted worthy of the final resurrection, shall neither suffer, nor sin, nor die any more, but live for ever, advancing continually in perfection and bliss. Such, Edward, was one of our Saviour's last, and one of His greatest miracles.

E. It is altogether a delightful history, dear Mamma; and I hope it will do me good. Was the resurrection of Lazarus the means of leading a great many more people to Christ?

M. We read that many did believe in Him in consequence; but on some, I am sorry to say, the effect was quite different. They went immediately to our Saviour's chief enemies the Pharisees, to tell them what Jesus had done. And when they heard of this wonderful miracle, which they knew would be likely to have a great effect upon the people, they

were much alarmed, and gathered together a council, to consider what could best be done. For they were afraid lest the people should receive Jesus as their Messiah, and set Him up as king; and they thought this might provoke the Romans to come and destroy their city and their temple. So they considered from this day forward how they might put Jesus to death; little thinking that by so doing they were hurrying on themselves those very evils which they feared, and bringing down upon their city, their temple, and their nation, the vengeance which God permitted the Romans to execute upon them, for this very crime. So infatuated were the Jewish rulers; so perverse the use they made of this glorious miracle; so determined were they to shut their eyes to the brightest evidence. Their conduct appears to us almost incredible. We can scarcely imagine such obstinate unbelief; such daring rejection of the truth. But when once men try to shut their eyes against the light, they do not know how far they may go, how deeply they may plunge in darkness. If they believe not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead. What a solemn warning is their example! let us be careful to profit by it, as well as by the record of this great miracle.

E. Let me have one look, dear Mamma, at Bethany before I go; it will always now be a favourite spot with me upon the map.

See *John* x. 22.—xi. 53.

THIRTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY EVENING.

THE GOOD SAMARITAN.

M. You heard, my dear child, of the effect which the raising of Lazarus produced upon the minds of the chief priests and Pharisees, and how they laid plans in consequence to put Jesus to death. But some months passed away before they were able to accomplish their wicked purpose. Meanwhile, to avoid public notice in Judea, our Lord retired for a time with His disciples to a city called Ephraim; from which He afterwards proceeded to Capernaum. But you must not suppose that He in any degree gave up the great work in which He was engaged. No; He continued to pursue His heavenly labours to the last; and that the Gospel might be spread more and more, on every side, He now appointed seventy other ministers, besides the Apostles, and sent them forth to prepare His way before Him in all the towns and places of Galilee, to which He was now about to pay His last visit.

E. Were these seventy men to be preachers of the Gospel, Mamma?

M. Yes; our Lord commanded them to say to all who received them, "The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you." To those also who received them not they were to deliver the same message; for the kingdom of God was come to them also, in power, if not in mercy. Christ, you know, must reign until He hath put all enemies under His feet. Come His kingdom will. We daily pray that it *may* come. O may it come to us in *mercy*! May we be willing

subjects of Christ ! May His blessed kingdom be set up in our hearts ; that kingdom which is righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost ! may it throw down every thing that opposes itself to God, and reign and rule supreme ! So shall we escape those awful woes which Christ pronounces on the disobedient.

The seventy disciples went, at the bidding of Christ, upon their great errand ; and they returned again full of joy at the success which He had given them. They had beheld with wonder the power of His name ; for when the name of Jesus was spoken by these lowly men, the very devils submitted to their authority. Very precious to the Church were these wonderful endowments of the first preachers of the Gospel ; but to the individuals who possessed them they were not without danger : they might lead them to think more of these extraordinary outward gifts, than of those graces of the Gospel which have their seat in the hidden man of the heart. The power of working miracles was only given for a time, but those blessed fruits of the spirit, faith, hope, and charity, were to abide in the Church for ever ; and even we may partake of them. The miraculous gifts which Christ bestowed on His disciples are, you know, long since withdrawn from us : but the “ more excellent way ” still remains, open even to babes. Our Lord moderated the joy of His disciples at the gift of miracles, saying unto them, “ Notwithstanding in this rejoice not ; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.” And then the blessed Jesus rejoiced within Himself at the thought that the kingdom of heaven was now opened to the lowest and the least, who were comparatively but as babes in the world. Only there

must be a childlike spirit, a willingness to be taught and led by Christ; for of such is the kingdom of God. God rules as a father full of love and compassion for his children; and they as children must love, believe, obey, and confide in Him. Happier than kings and prophets are such children! "For many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which they see, and have not seen them, and to hear those things which they hear, and have not heard them."

E. Are you going to tell me now, Mamma, the names of all the different towns and places which the seventy disciples visited; and to which our Lord afterwards went Himself?"

M. I cannot do that, Edward, for we have no mention of them in the Gospel; but I am happy to tell you that much of the instruction which our Saviour gave at this time has been graciously preserved to us. It was now, for instance, that Christ spoke that beautiful parable of the good Samaritan, of which you are all so fond: I call it a parable because it is generally called so, though not in the Bible. Some think it was an occurrence which did really take place, and which our Lord made use of for the sake of teaching a most excellent and important lesson. I will tell you what led to it.

A teacher of the Jewish law came to Jesus, saying, "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" A most solemn and important question! but one which ought ever to be asked in all seriousness and sincerity, not with the deceitful purpose which this expounder of the law had in asking it, for he did it merely to "tempt" Christ, that is, to try and ensnare Him in His own words; to make Him say something that He

might cavil at, and find fault with. What must the Searcher of hearts have felt when such a man as this approached Him ! How reasonably might it have been expected, that He would have put him to shame for his evil intentions before all the people by some just and severe rebuke. But observe the mildness as well as wisdom of our Lord's reply. He knew the heart of this lawyer ; knew his intention ; yet He condescends to answer his question, and that not angrily, but in such a way as to lead him to humility ; and send him away with his conscience seriously affected, unless indeed he were utterly insensible to every good feeling.

The lawyer says, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Our Saviour sends him back to that law of which he was an expounder, asking him what answer he would find in the law of Moses to so important a question. The lawyer replied, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbour as thyself."

E. Was that a good answer, Mamma?

M. It was the only answer the *Law* could give ; and our Lord approved of it, and told the lawyer that if he did all this he should certainly live for ever. For the law promised life to all who obeyed it.

E. But, Mamma, he could not keep that law ; neither he, nor any human being ; no not even Daniel or Elijah could keep it. You have often told me so.

M. You are quite right, my child : the obedience which the law required was a perfect and unsinning

obedience ; it allowed of no failure, not even in a single point, but pronounced an awful curse on every one who in any degree departed from it, as we may see in *Deut. xxvii. 26* ;—and this a person whose business it was to explain that law to the people, ought to have known.

But this important truth the lawyer before us seems to have forgotten altogether ; or he had such a good opinion of himself, and was so blind to the state of his own heart, that he thought he had perfectly obeyed the law, and was therefore entitled to eternal life. We may imagine that this was the case, from what follows immediately after. For when Jesus had said to him, “Thou hast answered right ; this do, and thou shalt live,”—he immediately went on to justify himself ; and, to show how well he did perform the duties of the law, he said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbour ?”

Oh ! how many human beings, sinful like ourselves, would have turned away angry and disgusted with such pride and selfconceit !

But Jesus still bore with him ; and, instead of irritating him by reproof, He placed before him that beautiful picture of real neighbourly kindness and charity which we have in the story of the good Samaritan. At this he was to look, and see whether he had really loved his neighbour as himself. Read the parable to me yourself ; and then we will examine it a little together.

E. “And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho.”

M. You can show me Jericho, I know, in a moment on the map ; for we have often had occasion to look

at it before. Travellers tell us, that the road to Jericho from Jerusalem passes through a continuation of rocky defiles, and that the surrounding scenery is of the most gloomy and forbidding aspect. The whole road is considered the most dangerous that can any where be found in Judea. From the many murders committed there, it used to be called "the bloody way:" and its very appearance was such as to fill the traveller with fear. Bold projecting masses of rocks burying every thing beneath them in their own dark shadows, cliffs above of towering height, gloom and solitude and desolation on every side, such is the picture which they give us of it. On this gloomy road it was no unlikely or uncommon thing for the quiet and unprotected traveller to fall among thieves, and be left stripped, and wounded, and half dead: and as Priests and Levites lived at Jericho in great numbers, and were continually of course going up to Jerusalem to perform their services in their turns in the temple, they were the persons who would be most likely to pass by and behold this melancholy sight. And I am afraid, Edward, sad as it seems, it is not impossible that both a Levite and a Priest might have actually come down that way, and either have taken no notice at all of their poor suffering fellow creature, or merely gazed on him idly for a moment, and then have passed by on the other side! I am afraid, melancholy as are such pictures of human nature, that there have been such in every age. Selfishness hardens the heart, and leads people at last to do things, which once they would have thought utterly impossible.

If ever we, my dear child, should be inclined, either from a selfish regard to our own pleasure, from indo-

lence, or from any other unworthy feeling, to neglect a fellow creature in distress, or to gaze idly on his misery without attempting to relieve it, let us think of this Priest and Levite, who “passed by on the other side :” for then too surely, however we may dislike to acknowledge it even to ourselves, we shall resemble them.

But let us turn to the more refreshing side of the picture ; and, whilst we contemplate an act so full of mercy, let us earnestly pray that the same blessed spirit may be poured into our own hearts.

Men are not all equally selfish, though all are more or less so by nature. But some there are whose hearts have been taught to feel for others even as for themselves ; to pity the sorrows and sufferings they see around them, and to do their very utmost to relieve it. Such a man was the good Samaritan. He too ; like the Priest and the Levite, was passing that way : indeed he seems to have had some more important business on hand than either of them ; for he is spoken of, not merely as coming to the spot by chance, but as journeying. He might therefore have made some better excuse, if he had wished it, for merely gazing on this melancholy scene, and then going on his way ; for people who are on a journey do not easily allow themselves to be stopped ; they pass on anxiously to the place where they are going. But had this good man wished it, he might have found a stronger reason still for not stopping to relieve the poor stranger who lay before him ; for he was a Samaritan, and the Jews and the Samaritans had no dealings with one another, no dealings of business, friendship, or common intercourse, but were at open enmity with one another. How many under such circumstances would have said,

“ Let his own countrymen take care of him; a wounded or dying Jew can have no claims upon me.” But this Samaritan was altogether superior to such feelings as these: he knew that, however much we may differ from people in *opinion*, we should be kind and charitable to all; be ready to help all, Jews, Turks, infidels and heretics. Even brute creatures have a claim upon our compassion: how much more have men, our fellow beings, whom God made in his own image, whom Jesus Christ came down from Heaven to save! The Priest and the Levite indeed passed by without attempting to assist the wounded man, though he was one of their own countrymen, and though works of charity were especially a part of their sacred office. But the Samaritan could not do it; the love of God was in his heart, and that will show itself by love to our fellow creatures, not in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth: indeed if we do not thus love one another, we have no reason at all to suppose that we really love God. “ Whoso hath this world’s goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?” Happy Samaritan! he gave good proof that he did indeed love God. He stopped, though in the midst of his journey; interrupted his business, however important; ran the risk of being robbed himself; did all he could at the moment to heal the poor man’s bruises, and staunch his wounds; then placed him tenderly on his own beast and carried him to an inn. Nor does his kindness cease even there. Arrived at the inn, he continued to provide for him, by placing him under the landlord’s care, showing him that he was anxious about him, giving him money to pay for what he would require, and

promising that he would repay the host, when he came again, whatever more he should have spent upon him. In short, neither time, trouble, nor expense did this good Samaritan spare in the work of mercy which he had undertaken. This was indeed *neighbourly* kindness: he who thus showed mercy, acted truly as a *neighbour* to him who fell among the thieves. Even the lawyer acknowledged this; and it is to be hoped he went away conscience-struck with his own deficiency; and ashamed to think how far, when it came to the point, he fell short of that charity which the law requires, that perfect love both to God and man, which it expects from each of us.

But we may look at the beautiful picture here given us a little more closely. The narrative is addressed to us, as well as to the lawyer. Have not we too much need to be humbled, as we compare our own daily and hourly feelings and conduct with that of the example before us?

E. I am sure I have, dear Mamma: I have been thinking so all the time.

M. May God convince us all, my child, that we come miserably short of all that He requires of us; that, feeling our own guilt, we may see our need of our Saviour's precious blood to cleanse us from it; and, being aware of our own weakness in the practice of what is good, we may look more earnestly and constantly for the renewing influence of His Holy Spirit. He alone can create in us those lovely tempers which we so admire when we do see them. He alone can take out of our hearts those selfish and uncharitable feelings which destroy our own happiness, and the happiness of those around us. Let us fervently pray

to Him to put the spirit of charity in our heart, that so we may not content ourselves with *feelings* of pity instead of the *practice* of mercy, nor be satisfied with perceiving the beauty of the Samaritan's conduct, but may resolutely try to *imitate* it. Our Lord sets it before us here as a *pattern* of what he wishes us to practise. Then said Jesus, Go, and *do*, not merely *feel*, not merely *talk*, but "Go, and *do* thou likewise."

See *John* xi. 54. *Luke* x. 1—37.

THIRTY-NINTH SUNDAY EVENING.

CHRIST THE GUEST OF HIS CREATURES.

M. During the short period which remained of our Lord's ministry upon earth, He seems to have been constantly employed in teaching and doing good to men. We are not, indeed, always told what the cities and villages were, which He vouchsafed to visit, nor yet all that He did and said: as St. John says, "If they should be written every one, I suppose the world itself could not contain the things that should be written." Still we have many specimens of His teaching, many proofs of His unwearied labours of love, and many instances of His wonderful patience in bearing with sinners, and inviting them to come to Him. Sometimes we find Him instructing His friends, sometimes reproving His enemies; now showing the Pharisees and lawyers the grievous faults and errors into which they had fallen; and now preparing His own followers for their coming trials and sorrows. One moment He would caution the people against covetousness and worldly

care ; at another instant exhort all to be continually on the watch, lest judgments in this world or in the next should overtake them. It is impossible for us to dwell at large on all these things ; besides, I hope, by these conversations with you to lead you to search the word of God yourself. My great object is, to give you a taste of that blessed book ; to show you what treasures it contains ; to set you on a right plan of studying it ; and to help you to draw lessons for your own conduct and practice from every page of it. When we shall have gone through the New Testament together, as we have the Old, there will still be many, many things left untold, which you will have the pleasure of reading for yourself. I shall now, however, choose one or two subjects to dwell upon more at length.

E. Thank you, dear Mamma ; for, after all, I do love to read these things with you.

M. And you will, I am sure, like to hear a little more of Martha and Mary, the sisters of Lazarus.

In the journey which our Lord was now taking, He came to a village, where these two sisters appear to have been at the time living together in a house belonging to Martha, where Jesus, who had so lately gladdened their hearts by restoring to them their brother, was received no doubt with the most lively gratitude and joy. “ O happy house, into which the Son of God vouchsafed to set his foot ! O blessed women, who were allowed to entertain the God of heaven ! We might well envy them their happiness, if we did not know that the very same favour is vouchsafed to ourselves.”

E. How, dear Mamma ?

M. There are two ways in which each one of us is

permitted to entertain the Saviour of the world ; one, by showing kindness to the poor who belong to Him ; and one, by opening our own hearts to welcome Him. Has He not said, “ Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me :” and again, “ Behold I stand at the door and knock ; if any one will open the door, I will come in unto him and sup with him, and he with me.” Yes, our Saviour does stand at the door of our hearts, and does, in various ways, knock there continually ; sometimes by His Word, sometimes by His Providence, sometimes by His Spirit. Now He tries by sorrow, which He sends for that very purpose, and oftener still by mercies He tries to gain an entrance there. And if we do but open those hearts to Him, and show that we desire Him to be with us, He will be sure to visit our souls with His presence, and to visit us, not for a little while, but to dwell with us for ever. In the house of Martha He staid but for a few short hours ; but in the humble and contrite heart He will rest for everlasting ¹.

But to return to the happy sisters. They both loved our Lord very much, and thought they could not do enough to show their gratitude and affection ; but one showed it in a manner more pleasing to our Saviour than the other. “ Mary sat at Jesus’ feet, and heard his words.” Such an opportunity of being instructed by our Lord was too precious in her view to be lost ; but Martha was so anxious to prepare an entertainment for Jesus, that she could not spare time to listen to that teaching, which was able to save her

¹ Bishop Hall.

soul; and she even thought it hard that Mary did not leave her place at our Lord's feet, and help her in her hospitable work. Indeed she came to Jesus with a kind of complaint against Mary, saying, "Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone?"

Let us never forget the reply which our Lord made: for "Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things, but one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her." No doubt these solemn and affectionate words went to the heart of Martha; and I wish they might reach our hearts too. Martha's employment was a very happy one; it was that of waiting on our Lord; and yet even that became sinful, if it occupied too much of her time and thoughts, and made her forgetful of her own soul. How few of *our* employments would bear to be compared to hers! How much more care then is necessary in our case, that our hearts be not too much taken up even with the best or most innocent of our occupations, so as to make us forget the only thing which is comparatively important, the care of our never dying souls.

How blessed and happy a thing it would be for us, if our love for our Lord Jesus Christ were more than our love for all things else beside. Our kind parents and friends, our own brothers and sisters, our sweet home, our pleasant books, our innocent pleasures, all these may be dear, very dear to us, for God has given them all, and may bless all. But to sit at Jesus' feet should be dearer than all beside. Oh! for a place for each one of us with Mary there! Like her

may we look to Him for instruction, and learn from His holy word: for this is that better part which shall never, no never be taken away from us.

I will tell you now of another interesting circumstance which happened whilst our Lord was engaged in His journeyings from place to place, during the last few months of His ministry.

It was customary among the more wealthy Jews to make religious feasts; and their intention, no doubt, in this was at first pious and charitable. They were sometimes given even on the Sabbath-day, and, as we find our Lord occasionally honouring them with His own presence, we may be quite sure that there was nothing about them contrary to the intention of that sacred rest. It was at such a feast as this that we find our Lord during His last visit to Galilee. It was in the house too of one of the chief Pharisees; for our Lord never refused to eat either with them or the Publicans, when by so doing He might have an opportunity of doing good. He went therefore on this occasion into a Pharisee's house to eat bread on the Sabbath day, though He knew that every word and every action would be narrowly watched, if not by His host, at least by the friends of the Pharisee. Now, when our Lord was in the house, a man presented himself before him who had a dropsy. He did not ask Jesus to cure him; for perhaps he was afraid of asking Him to perform a miracle on the Sabbath day; but Jesus, with His wonted compassion, immediately thought of healing him. He knew however that for such an act the Pharisees and lawyers would accuse Him, according to their false notions, of breaking the Sabbath; for they would not allow even

a suffering fellow creature to be healed on the Lord's day ; though, when their own property or their own convenience was concerned, they had no fears about breaking the Sabbath. Our Lord, therefore, before He attempted to heal the sick man, put the plain question to them " Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day ?"

E. I wonder what they said.

M. They were ashamed perhaps to say, No ; lest they should be charged, as they justly might have been, with unfeeling cruelty : yet they had not the charity or the wisdom, to say, Yes. Christ however healed the poor sufferer, and sent him away ; and then He said to the Pharisees, " Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the Sabbath-day ?" showing them plainly their selfishness and inconsistency ; since they would venture to save an animal from perishing on the Sabbath, but for a suffering fellow creature would have no consideration.

Here then we are taught, that to relieve sickness or misery is not to profane the day of sacred rest ; that such a work is not only permitted, because it is necessary, but acceptable in the sight of God, because it is charitable.

Having performed this cure, and corrected the error of the Pharisees, our Lord observed that the guests who had been invited to this repast were choosing each for himself the highest and best places at the table, and He did not consider even this circumstance unworthy of His notice.

Our dispositions, and principles, and tempers are
[*Second Series.*]

all important in the sight of our Lord Jesus Christ; and they may show themselves in small, as well as in great things. Indeed the actions of our life are made up of things comparatively trifling; and if we only practise the rules of the Gospel on great occasions, we may neglect them the chief part of our lives. The Christian graces would not then be cultivated by us at all. Clearly this would not be right. We must be careful in all things, small as well as great, to feel and act as Christ has taught us in His holy word. Hence, Edward, the importance of really *good* manners; such manners I mean, as show that gentleness, and humility, and absence of selfishness, on which the politeness we see in the world *professes* to be founded. But, in reality, I fear these lovely tempers and feelings are seldom, or ever found, but in those whose hearts have been renewed by the Spirit of God, and who act continually in all their ways from Christian principles, as well as in a Christian manner. He that knows that he ought never to exalt himself, will not do it even at a social repast. Such a disposition, if encouraged *then* would soon show itself in more serious matters; whilst the person, who practises humility and self-denial, and modesty and kindness in all the little opportunities of daily life, will be likely to show them too on much greater occasions. Remember, my child, that nothing is unimportant where principle can be put in practice; and principle, that is, the determination to choose what is right in God's sight, ought to pervade every thing we do, and think, and say. Remember too that it is in small things we prepare ourselves for greater. It is

by daily practice that you accomplish any difficult thing which you wish to learn; and it is only by practising day by day all that is lovely and good, that we may become at last, through divine grace, “thoroughly furnished unto every good work.”

There was another virtue taught us by our blessed Lord whilst He was dining at the house of the Pharisee. This was hospitality. Now, hospitality, in the religious sense of the word, is not shown by giving great entertainments to our friends and rich neighbours, who can repay us again, but by receiving and providing for those who need our help, and who cannot return our kindness. Therefore our Lord said to the Pharisee, and through him to us, “When thou makest a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours, lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the halt, and the blind, and thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee; for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.”

E. Mamma, was not Abraham hospitable when he received the angels that came to him?

M. Yes; St. Paul reminds us of his example, when he says, “Be not forgetful to entertain *strangers*; for by so doing some have entertained angels unawares.” We have many instances of real hospitality in the Bible, such as the kindness shown by the Shunamite to Elisha, that of the poor widow who divided with Elijah her last handful of meal, and her last drop of oil. And in every case mentioned, we find the blessing of God accompanying the kind and hospitable act.

But there is one more use, and that a most important one, which we may make of the subject now before us. Before our blessed Lord left the table of the Pharisee, he called away the thoughts of those who were present at that entertainment, to a far higher and richer feast, to which we are all invited : a feast where there is no dread of excess, no danger of being too often found, no fear that any shall be sent empty away. I speak, my child, of the feast of the Gospel ; those good things which God has there prepared for our souls. But, alas ! how few amongst us really care to partake of these things ! For instance, of those who profess to believe in a Saviour's dying love, how few ever come to that supper, which He has instituted to keep the memory of it ever fresh in our hearts ! The Lord Jesus has said, "Do this in remembrance of me ;" and we should think that none could resist such a loving command ; that all would be glad to be again and again reminded that that sacred body had been bruised, and that precious blood shed for us men and our salvation. But when we see what numbers turn away whenever that sacred feast is spread, what numbers make excuse, we perceive that it is not really so.

Happy however are those who do draw near to it ; who, whilst they feel that they "are not indeed worthy to gather up the crumbs which fall from that table," do so hunger and thirst after God, that they cannot stay away ! Blessed are they, for God has promised that "they shall be filled." Yea, blessed are they beyond all understanding ; for they shall be accepted and honoured guests, at that glorious banquet, which is hereafter to be enjoyed in the world to come : they

shall join that great company which “shall come from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and all the Prophets in the kingdom of God.”

See *Luke* x. 38—42; xiv. 1—24. .

FORTIETH SUNDAY EVENING.

RECOVERY OF THE LOST.

M. I have often told you, Edward, how the multitudes crowded about Christ, when they saw His wonderful works, and heard His divine wisdom. How would a vain, worldly teacher have delighted in thus assembling admiring crowds to swell His own train, and gratify His love of human praise ! But our Lord did not think of Himself: He only thought of the immense responsibility these poor people were incurring, if they heard His words, and then went away without really profiting by them. He knew, what they, probably, had never thought of, how much deliberation, resolution, and perseverance were necessary in order really to follow Him: they must *deliberate*, or think well before hand, what it was to enter His service, that when they had entered it they might be *resolute* in it: and they must be resolute in bearing the difficulties they should meet with in it, in order that they might *persevere* unto the end. Religion, the religion of Christ, is not a thing, my dear child, to be taken up without *thought*. It promises great blessings, it is true; but it requires great *sacrifices* also. It requires always that we should give up for Christ's

sake all our sins and follies ; and it may sometimes require, as it did at first, that men should be ready to give up even nearest and dearest friends.

Our Lord pressed this strongly upon the multitude who crowded after Him, in the following parable : “ Which of you intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first and counteth the cost, whether he hath sufficient to finish it ? Lest haply after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. Or what king going to make war against another king sitteth not down first and consulteth whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand ? ”

The inclination shown by the multitude to follow Christ was in itself very pleasing ; but if it should prove to have been only a momentary feeling, if it should fail in the time of trial, it would be of little value.

E. But, Mamma, I am sure our Lord did not wish to hinder people from coming to Him ?

M. Far from it, Edward. His readiness to receive every penitent sinner was shown, you know, by His conduct. Do you not remember that it was frequently made a matter of reproach against him, that He did receive sinners, and eat with them ? And what was His reply ?

E. “ They that are whole need not a physician ; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”

M. And as if that were not enough, we have the same assurance given us again in three most interesting parables : one of the lost sheep, one of the lost

piece of money, and another of the lost son. Let us read the two first of these.

E. “And he spake this parable unto them, saying, What man having an hundred sheep,” &c.

M. How beautiful they are; and what an idea do they convey to us of Christ’s love for the poor, perishing sinner! He came to seek, and to save that which was lost, and He is pleased to represent His anxiety for its recovery, and the joy which is felt in heaven when it is found again, by our feelings when we lose, or when we recover, what we love or value very much. Whilst it is lost, it engrosses all our thoughts; when it is found, it is for the time the sole subject of our joy; though but small perhaps in value, compared with many other things which we possess. Take first the case of the lost sheep: ninety and nine more the shepherd has; but for a time he forgets them all, and thinks only of the one which has strayed from the fold. For that one wanderer he is unceasingly anxious, until he has found it again: over that he rejoices, when it is restored to His flock among “the pastures of the wilderness.” Now what the sheep are to the shepherd, such are we to God.

E. Yes, Mamma: the Bible tells us that we are “the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.”

M. Sheep, but, alas! *lost* sheep;—every one lost, until the good Shepherd of our souls came Himself to recover again those that could be found; those that were not gone utterly astray upon the dark mountains. “*All we,*” saith the prophet, “like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way.” And each one of us in particular may say, with David, “I have gone astray like a lost sheep: seek thy ser-

vant." As the sheep, when it wanders, would never find its own way back to the fold, because it is of all creatures the most dull, and foolish, and helpless ; so we should never, any one of us, return to Christ, if we were left to ourselves : we should never find our own way back to His safe and peaceful fold ; for dull and foolish are we too in all that concerns our spiritual welfare, and helpless too—utterly unable to preserve ourselves from the dangers which surround us on every side.

In the instance mentioned in the parable there was only one out of a hundred lost ; ninety and nine still remained. But where are the ninety and nine who have not erred and strayed from the ways of God, by following the devices and desires of their own hearts ? Not in this world certainly. The sheep that wander not from the fold, but keep quietly to their pastures, must be inhabitants of other worlds than this—blest angels who never fell ; who sympathize in the loss of man, created holy like themselves ; who watch affectionately for His return to God ; and who rejoice, for the time, over one sinner on earth that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine of their own sinless society to whom repentance is unnecessary. May we be the occasion of such joy ! and may we too rejoice over every recovered sinner, and not, with the Pharisees, refuse to join in the congratulations of angels !

E. And the parable of the lost piece of money is meant, I suppose, to teach us exactly the same thing ?

M. Yes the same gracious lesson is there repeated over again. But the parable which most strongly exhibits the readiness of our heavenly Father to forgive, and His tender mercy in receiving back the penitent,

is that of the lost son. Here it was not a senseless piece of money that was dropped, nor a poor sheep devoid of reason that had gone astray, but a beloved child who had left his father's house.

It is a melancholy tale, but full of consolation for returning sinners. Here was a young man, grown up and making his own deliberate choice—a son straying from the home of his childhood; discontented with the good order and wholesome restraints of his father's house, where he enjoyed comfort and abundance, and was kept from every evil, and begging to have his portion of goods, that he might go and seek happiness in his own way, or, as our Prayer Book says, might “follow the devices and desires of his own heart.”

Alas! how little do the young understand their real good, who thus give themselves up to their own guidance; who desire to be soon their own masters, and dislike that parental oversight which God has appointed for their safety and happiness! But this young man, like many others, was ignorant and foolish: he would not learn wisdom from his elders, but would buy it for himself by his own experience. Let us watch the result. His patrimony, I mean that share of his father's possessions which would one day have been his, was, as he requested, given to him at once; and he took it, and went away from his father's sight into a far country, where he got into bad company and riotous habits, and soon wasted all that he had in dissipation and intemperance. What must have been his feelings now! Oh that he had remained at his dear home, and left his portion of goods in his father's hands to be employed, as paternal love and wisdom saw fit, in promoting his real happiness! He was now

pennyless ; and to add to his misery, “ when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land, and he began to be in want.”

E. Oh, Mamma, what would he do now ?

M. His situation was a distressing one indeed. An idle, dissipated young man was not likely to find either friends or respectable employment. His riotous companions, as is usually the case with all such companions, deserted him. Occupation however at last he did obtain ; but what sort of occupation do you think ? A citizen of that country moved by his entreaties so far took notice of him that he sent him into his fields to feed swine ? In any country this is regarded as one of the meanest occupations ; but amongst the Jews it was not mean only, it was against their law, unholy. What a transition ! The extravagant, gay, and luxurious young man earnestly begging such an employment from a stranger ! He who had wasted so much on banquets, now feeding swine in order to satisfy his own hunger ; yea envying the very swine the husks that they were eating, but compelled to wait till his day’s work was over. He was now less an object of concern than the swine ; they were fed while he fasted : if others employed in the same fields had their repast amidst their work, they thought not of his want, “ and no man gave unto him.”

E. But why had he not thought of going back to his home and seeking relief there ?

M. Alas ! sin perverts the feelings and darkens the understanding. Perhaps he wanted the wisdom, or perhaps the humility, that such a step required.. He was, in a moral point of view, beside himself: his heart was infatuated with his evil courses.

But his present distress, so multiplied, so galling, so bitter, brought him at last to his senses. It pleased God to bless it to him. His eyes were at length opened, and he began to think and to speak as a rational being. “And when he came to himself, he said, how many hired servants of my father have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger ! I will arise and go to my father and say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son : make me as one of thy hired servants.”

E. I suppose he was sure his father would receive him ?

M. He expected, it seems, to be received, but not as a son. He had met with so little kindness in the world, that he no longer looked for much tenderness even at home, though he knew that his father was good and kind. What then must have been his surprise, his joy, as he approached his home, that home which he had so foolishly left, to see his father coming to meet him ! “For when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him,” embracing with fervent affection a child who had so little revered his invaluable guidance and protection ! But the father was full of pity and the son happily was full of penitence. For though he was now assured of his father’s forgiveness, though he had been received, not as a servant, but as a son, yet did he not forget to humble himself as he had determined. No ; his father’s readiness to be pacified only made him the more deeply ashamed of his past offences against him, and he interrupts the affectionate embraces of his parent

with the most humble confessions of his unworthiness :
“ Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.” It is said in scripture, “ he that humbleth himself shall be exalted ;” and so it proved now. “ No more worthy,” said the young man, “ to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him ; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet.”

The very confession of unworthiness added to the father’s joy, for it was a proof of his son’s repentance. What indeed should a father seek on such occasions but his child’s recovery ? Once satisfied of that—that he who had been dead to virtue and to shame, was now alive again ; that, though lost in folly and sin, he was found—he gave way to the utmost joy, and called upon his family and friends to rejoice with him, until the whole house resounded with a holy mirth.

E. It is a delightful story, Mamma : but do you think it is true ? or only a parable, as you said ?

M. I cannot tell you whether this affecting narrative of the prodigal son was really a true account of something that had really happened. It is possible that the case was one known to our Lord’s hearers ; but we can neither assert nor deny it. In one sense indeed it is too true. Too often do young men bring themselves to ruin by a love of pleasure and a dislike to parental content. In this view of the story we might learn from it the folly of youthful impetuosity, the dangers of the world, the value of home with all its endearing ties, as well as other most interesting and important lessons. But the chief use we are to

make of it is in applying it to the mercy of our heavenly Father in receiving back all repentant sinners, notwithstanding all the folly and perverseness of their former conduct, and the wretched state into which their sins have brought them.

Our Lord spoke the parable, because the Pharisees and Scribes murmured at His receiving publicans and sinners. Jesus does not deny that He received them; but justifies the ways of God, by showing what even a human parent would do in regard to the recovery of a lost child. For publicans and sinners may be lost, but still they are lost *children*, and will not God rejoice over their return?

Only let them truly repent, as the prodigal did; only let them trust in their heavenly Father's mercy through Christ; only let them turn their back upon their evil ways and hasten home; then may they rest assured that they too will be received, and not only received, but welcomed with joy and gladness. Their sins shall then be covered, their souls clothed with righteousness, and all their poverty, wretchedness, and misery changed into peace and joy.

But we have not yet done altogether with this affecting parable. The prodigal was the younger, you know, of two sons. At the time of his return his elder brother was in the field; and as he came home and drew nigh unto the house, he heard music and dancing, the sounds of that rejoicing with which his father's house resounded at his lost brother's return: but "he was angry, and would not go in."

E. How very unkind!

M. And very wrong undoubtedly; yet, I fear, not unnatural. There is scarcely any affection like that

of a parent. Even that of brothers and sisters, sweet and pleasant as it often is, is not to be compared with it. What a treasure is it which God has provided for children in the feelings of a father or mother ! that tender love and pity by which the Almighty is pleased even to represent his own compassion towards us. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him."

But though the brother could not feel all that the father felt, he ought certainly to have joined with all his heart in the general rejoicing of the house ; but a sad feeling had arisen in his mind, something like the temper which, you may remember, Jonah showed towards the Ninevites ; a grudging of God's mercy towards his perishing fellow-creatures ; as if there were not enough for all. There was a good deal of jealousy too, apparently, in the elder brother ; for when his father went out, and entreated him affectionately to come in and share their happiness, he burst into a complaint against this tender parent for loving his wandering brother better than himself. "Lo," he said, "these many years do I serve thee ; neither transgressed I at any time thy commandments ; and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends." But this was altogether a mistake, as the father immediately assured him ; for he said unto him, "Son, thou art ever with me ; and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry and be glad : for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again ; and was lost, and is found."

E. But do you think, Mamma, that the father really loved the elder son as much as the younger ?

M. There can, I think, be no doubt of it. Can we for a moment suppose that a dutiful, obedient child, who had never willingly grieved his parent, could be less dear to him than one who had so openly rebelled against him? Oh! no, this joy was the joy of the occasion; the joy of congratulation, the joy of recovering what is lost, and could not in the least interfere with, or exceed, or hardly perhaps equal, that calm, confiding, deep affection with which he beheld the child who had never left him. Nor need the righteous who have long been, like the elder son, happily serving God, ever fear that they are less precious in His sight, than the poor wandering sinner who has just returned.

E. But Mamma, can it be said of any human beings, as it was of the elder son, that they have been always with God?

M. I will not venture to say, my child, that it never has been, or can be so; though I am sure that, *in general*, it is very far from being the case. There may be some who, dedicated to God like Samuel in their infancy, have continued his faithful servants all their lives long; some who, like Timothy, have known the Scriptures from their childhood, and, like Joseph, have been preserved amidst all the trials of youth;—some happy ones, who have never left the family of God since they were brought into it by baptism; never been persuaded to seek their happiness amid the pleasures of the world, and to end by feeding upon its miserable husks. Whilst yet in their cradles they were placed in their Saviour's arms, and, though lost in Adam, were found by Christ, as soon as born, and never lost again. Oh! that such might be the case with all my dear children! brought up in the nurture

and admonition of the Lord, and enjoying for ever, the blessings and privileges of His family ! Such a blessing cannot be sought for too earnestly, either by your parents for you, or by each one of you for yourselves. Depend upon it, they who remember their Creator in the days of their youth, enjoy a degree of happiness, of which those who forget God, can have no idea ; not to say that thus they escape those deep and bitter sufferings which all who wander from the right way must sooner or later experience. Besides, who shall say that the wanderer shall ever return ? For one who is brought back, what numbers perish !

See *Luke* xiv. 25—35, and xv.

FORTY-FIRST SUNDAY EVENING.

DANGER OF RICHES.

M. We spent our last Sunday evening in considering God's mercy to the returning sinner, put before us so strikingly and beautifully, especially in the parable of the prodigal son, that I think we can never forget it. This part of our blessed Saviour's preaching was very important ; and considering how lost we all are by nature, and how much, even in practice we resemble this wandering child, we cannot rejoice too much in such portions of God's holy word. We cannot be too thankful that God has opened so wide the doors of His mercy and invited all, even the most wretched and the most lost, to return unto Him. But precious as this subject is to all who feel that they have indeed erred and strayed from God like lost sheep, the Saviour did not of course dwell only upon

this. His teaching was very full, and very various. He not only sought the sheep that were lost, but provided abundant pasture for those that were in the fold, He felt, it would seem, the vast importance of putting particular duties strongly before His people, that they might diligently try and examine themselves, and see whether they were indeed His disciples. Perhaps there are few, if any parts of Christian conduct, on which our gracious Lord has not condescended to give us instruction and direction. For Jesus knew the heart of man; He knew that it was not only very wicked, but very deceitful too, and that the only way to make us really humble was to show us in how many points we daily and hourly offend. Men are, for the most part, very ready to confess themselves sinners, yet few like to acknowledge that they have been guilty of any one particular sin. And they are many who love and admire religion in a general way, but shrink from it when they look at it more closely, and see what self-denying sacrifices it requires.

This shows itself in many ways, but in none more perhaps than in the love of *riches*; one of the commonest snares to which the human soul is exposed; one of the greatest dangers perhaps which it has to encounter in its path to heaven. Now there is no subject on which our Lord's teaching is more unlike the notions of the world, than on this very important one of earthly riches.

E. But, Mamma, good people do not care much about riches—do they?

M. I am afraid even those, whom we call good, do not see these things quite as Christ represented them. He teaches us that riches, though given us by God,

are not really our own ; that we have only the charge of them for a time,—a short time it may be ; and that then we shall have to give an account of them to Christ, to whom they really belong. But you had better learn this lesson, as the disciples of Christ learnt it, from the parable which our blessed Lord spoke to them upon the subject. Read me the first thirteen verses of the sixteenth chapter of St. Luke.

E. “ And he said also unto his disciples,” &c.

M. You will have no difficulty in understanding that the steward wasting his master's goods represents human beings like ourselves, to whom God has given in charge some outward advantages, some share more or less of this world's possessions ; and in the lord of that steward, who called upon him to give an account of the things committed to his trust, you will see a picture of our Divine Master, to whom we also must give an account of our stewardship. And for this account should not we too diligently prepare ? The unjust steward sets us an example here ; an example full of wisdom, for he acted wisely *for his own ends*. He teaches us to *look forward* ; to consider in time what account we shall have to give, and to prepare for judgment. But, alas ! men are much more wise as regards the things of this world, than they are for the next, although that is so much more important. We may learn wisdom, you know, even from the serpent. The world is wise ; the serpent is wise ; the Christian only is foolish. But let us, by God's grace, practise wisdom. And how is this to be done ? even by using our stewardship so as to make friends, who shall be of use to us in the day of judgment. By employing our talents and advantages, whatever they may be, to the

glory of God and our own eternal good ; and especially by so using our riches, which the Bible calls the mammon of unrighteousness. So shall we make friends who may receive us, not into decaying houses on earth but into heavenly habitations—*friends* in the poor, the distressed, the naked, the hungry ; friends in the angels ; and, above all, a Friend in Christ Himself.

It is very important to draw all our ideas and opinions from the word of God, and not from the notions of men, which are so often directly opposite to the divine will. Among men, persons are often highly esteemed and valued, merely because they are rich. But with God it is not so. What is highly esteemed among men is often abomination in His sight. He does not look at our wealth, but at the *use* we make of it. There is no gilding men over in His sight. Again, riches are looked upon in the world as the great means of happiness, because men place their happiness in bodily ease and pleasure, which riches can purchase. Yet they cannot buy health, nor a good appetite, nor sweet refreshing sleep. Above all they cannot buy peace of mind ; they cannot purchase everlasting happiness ; and if with money we could procure every thing that was to be enjoyed on earth, we could only enjoy it for a little while. In a few years, at most, we must take a long leave of this world, to enter for ever on another ; and we can carry nothing away with us when we die, but the precious hopes of the life to come. What a solemn and affecting picture does our Lord draw of all this, in the story of the rich man and Lazarus ! Who can read it without a pang ; without at least a momentary dread, lest he also should so have his good

things in this world, as to have none left for him in the world to come? Who can dwell upon this most awful and melancholy story, and not perceive that things *look* very differently in this world, from what they really are? See this rich man dressed in his purple and fine linen, and every day sitting down to his sumptuous fare: see too the poor miserable Lazarus lying neglected at his gate, covered with painful and disgusting sores. Within the mansion, all is splendour, magnificence, and gaiety: at the gate, rags, hunger, and misery. Had any one of us passed by at the time, what should we have said of Lazarus?

E. Ah, Mamma, how we should have pitied him, poor, miserable creature!

M. And what should we have said of Dives? should we not have thought him a most happy and enviable person? But wait a little. Wait only till they die.

E. That puts me in mind, Mamma, of what Solon said to Croesus, when Croesus asked him, if he did not think him a happy man: "No man can be deemed happy till his death."

M. It was an extraordinary answer, full of wisdom and truth, though it fell from the lips of a heathen Philosopher; and though not quite the same that we are now learning from a pure and more certain source, the Fountain of eternal truth. Solon spoke only of happiness on earth, Christ of bliss on high. "And it came to pass that the beggar died." How his body was buried we are not told; but the angels waited for his spirit, and took him to the heavenly banquet to sit next to Abraham, or, as it is said in Scripture, to lay his head on Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died; for one thing happeneth unto all, high and low,

rich and poor, one with another. He too died, and was buried, no doubt, as sumptuously as he had lived. To the last his body was taken care of. But his soul? It is now separated from his body, can no longer taste of those pleasures which riches purchase, and has none of its own to take their place. In the regions of departed spirits Dives lifts up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off with Lazarus in his bosom. He is now become the beggar, entreating that the very Lazarus, who had lain at his gate neglected, should be sent to him with but a drop, nay not a drop, but the mere touch of water, to cool his burning tongue. But in vain : it was too late ! the impassable gulf, the great ‘chasm,’ was fixed for ever. So that Lazarus could no longer come near to Dives, even if he would. Poor miserable Dives ! Whilst he was in this world, there was no gulf between him and heaven : it was open to him then, as it still is (blessed be God !) to us. Let us not wait, as he did, until it is too late !

Yet what had he done? Had he been unjust, cruel, oppressive, or openly profligate? Nothing of this kind is said against him, but simply that he sought for all his happiness in this life, and made no preparation for the next ; was rich to himself, but not towards God ; spent his wealth in mere selfish enjoyment, never remembering that he was God’s steward ; so that Lazarus was suffered to long even for the crumbs that fell from his table ! These were his crimes. It was for this he lifted up his eyes in hell, tormented in that flame ! Remember this, I pray you. Oh ! may God give us both grace to remember it, lest we also come to that place of torment !

E. And I am always the more sorry for him, Mamma, because he seems to have been so kind to his brothers.

M. The request which he makes so earnestly for them, shows us indeed that he was not what the world calls unamiable : he had feeling for his brothers though not for the poor. But his request was not granted. Why? Because if they did not believe Moses and the prophets, they would not believe, though one did go unto them from the dead. The heart that does not attend to the word of God, is too hard to be softened, even by so great a miracle. Did not the Israelites become so accustomed to God's wonders in the wilderness, as to care little about them? Did not the Pharisees cavil continually at the miracles of our Lord? Are our hearts naturally better than theirs? When Lazarus *did* return from the dead, did the Pharisees repent? No; from that day forth they took counsel to put Jesus to death.

E. Mamma, after reading this story I do not wonder our Lord should say it is a difficult thing for a rich man to go to heaven.

M. It certainly throws much light upon those very strong expressions, which He afterwards made use of to his disciples. "Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God. And again I say unto you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." Riches make men love earth, not heaven; and nothing but the especial grace of God can enable us whilst we have them, not to set our hearts upon them. With men indeed this is quite impossible, but with God all

things are possible. There are many persons, whose conduct, as far as men observe it, is all that is moral and amiable and right, but whose hearts, as God sees them, are fast tied down to this present evil world. Indeed it was a case like this which led our blessed Saviour to say, "How hardly shall men that have riches enter into the kingdom of God !" We are told that a young man came to Jesus, and said unto him, "Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life." And we find, from our Lord's conversation with him, that there was much in his character that was lovely and good, and, more than all, an earnest desire to obtain eternal life. "He wanted, however, one thing," but that the chief thing, a willingness to give up earth for heaven ; treasure here below, where moth and rust corrupt, and thieves break through and steal, for everlasting treasure, and abiding riches in the kingdom of heaven. Our blessed Lord had listened to his enquiry most graciously, and looking at him with much love and compassion, invited him to leave all his riches, and to take up his cross and follow Him ; adding a most encouraging promise, that, if he would do this, he should have treasure in heaven. But, unhappily, when the young man heard this, he was very sorrowful : for he was very rich, and instead of following Christ, he went away grieved.

Poor unhappy young man ! What a foolish choice he made ! How little did he know the value of what he was giving up, and how bitterly would he repent in a short time, the choice which he had made ! We hear no more of him ; we are only told that Jesus looked after him sorrowfully, as he turned away, and then gave his disciples that solemn warning against the love of riches, which I noticed to you just now !

And not only warning, but promises too ; rich promises for all those who should have faith enough to give up what they loved best on earth, rather than run any risk of losing heaven. “There is no man,” our Lord declared, “that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, or lands for my sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come everlasting life.”

Our discourse to night, my dear child, has been full of most solemn instruction ; pressing upon us from first to last, by several melancholy examples, the immense importance of making preparation for the life to come. The parable of the unjust steward, of the rich man and Lazarus, and the case of the young man who had so great possessions, were all intended to fix this lesson deeply in our minds.

E. And, Mamma, there is the case of the foolish rich man and his barns.

M. Yes ; he had riches enough for a world, which he might leave in a night ; but none in that world, where he was to be for ever. Such wisdom is indeed the height of folly.

See *Luke* xvi. xviii. 18—30. *Matt.* xix. 16—30.
Mark x. 17—31.



FORTY-SECOND SUNDAY EVENING.

CHRIST'S LAST JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM.

M. We have noticed before that our blessed Lord was now on his way to Jerusalem, journeying towards it by gentle degrees, steadily determined to return to that deluded city, notwithstanding the enmity of the Pharisees, and their plots to take away His life.

E. May I bring the chart, Mamma, and see which way He was going? I do so love to follow His steps, as well as I can, there.

M. Yes, it adds greatly to the interest of the sacred narrative, and we ought to be very thankful for all the assistance which is thus afforded us in the study of the Scriptures.

E. Here, Mamma, I think I have found our Lord's path in His last journey to Jerusalem. See, it seems to have led Him along the borders of Samaria and Galilee, just between the two countries, and through the country which is to the east of the river Jordan. How interesting these beautiful little pictures¹ make the map!

M. We can almost fancy by their help that we are ourselves following our Divine Redeemer, and watching with our own eyes His acts of mercy: there we have a picture of the very event I was going to relate to you. I think it may almost take my place, and tell you all that you will wish to hear.

E. Oh! no, dear Mamma; let me have both, if you please: the picture, that I may fancy better what you are telling me; and your explanation, that I may understand and enjoy the picture.

M. Well then, let us turn to the Gospel again, where we find it written, that, "As he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off." You know what that means, I think.

E. Oh! yes, poor men! it means that they were not allowed to come near any of their fellow-creatures, because of that dreadful leprosy.

¹ See Mimpriss's Chart of the Gospels.

M. Yes, I have told you before, that the leprosy was so very loathsome and infectious a disorder, that, by the law of Moses, any person afflicted by it, was obliged to avoid all communication with those around him. Thus to live by himself, or only with unhappy persons like himself, must have been a dreadful addition to sufferings, which in themselves were great enough.

E. Well, I do not much mind hearing of these lepers, though it generally makes my heart ache to think of them; for I have no fear but that Jesus could heal them. You know we have heard already of one whom he made whole.

M. And many more than one; for you may remember that, in the message sent to John the Baptist, Jesus particularly mentioned, not only that the blind received their sight, and that the lame walked, but that even the lepers were cleansed. Poor creatures! they would hardly have ventured to ask any one else to help them: or if they had, they would only have been driven away: besides which they knew no doubt that their dreadful disorder was incurable. Vain for them was the help of man, but in Jesus they saw one greater than man. Happily for them they had heard of His unbounded compassion, and believed in His miraculous power, and therefore, though still standing afar off, because they were unclean, yet they lifted up their voices aloud for help, and earnestly implored His compassion, crying "Jesus, Master, have mercy upon us." Nor did He turn away from that cry. Loathsome as leprosy is, it is in the sight of Jesus far less loathsome than sin.

E. Yes, Mamma, I am sure it was; and its consequences are much less dreadful.

M. And therefore in reality the diseases of the soul are far more hideous than the worst of all bodily disorders. Yet Christ received sinners, and ate with them; He pitied them, and came to save them from their sins: therefore the poor lepers might be very sure that He had help also for them. And how speedy was that help! "He said unto him, Go, show yourselves to the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed." They were sent to the priest, that he might examine them, and judge whether they were really cured, and might safely mix with the congregation again. To send them therefore to the priest, was in reality to promise them a cure; otherwise it would only have been a mockery of their woe.

E. Ten lepers cleansed at once! What a happy story!

M. Yes, and yet your joy will be much moderated, I fear, if I tell you it to the end. What will you say when you hear that, out of all this party, there was only one, who, when he saw that he was healed, turned back and with a loud voice glorified God; only one that fell down at the feet of Jesus giving Him thanks? And that one was a Samaritan, who must have known much less of God than any of the rest.

E. Only one! Where were the other nine?

M. Satisfied with the mercy received, they never once thought of the Saviour who bestowed it! You are disappointed, Edward; and I do not wonder. It is an interesting, but a melancholy narrative; most interesting, for it richly displays the power and compassion of Christ; most melancholy, as it sets before us the great ingratitude of nine of these lepers. How anx-

iously did they all cry for relief beforehand ; but how little did they think of acknowledging it when it came, and glorifying God for answering their prayer ! This was indeed ungrateful ; and yet I fear it is but too true a picture of what takes place every day among men, and (shall I say it, Edward ?) even among ourselves.

E. Do you really think so, dear Mamma ?

M. You must judge for yourself. All our blessings, (and what a multitude they are !) come from God ; yet how few comparatively love Him for them, and glorify Him by thankful hearts and obedient lives ! Even when His mercy delivers us from some pressing calamity : when God is pleased, for instance, to raise us up from some long sickness, to deliver us from some imminent danger, to relieve us from the pressure of poverty, or to bless us with a sweet reunion with those we love after long and grievous separation, these evils, at the time, we feel deeply, and pray earnestly to be delivered from ; but scarcely one in ten pauses to bless God for His goodness ; and that one will often be the least favoured in regard to religious knowledge. There is nothing which men abhor so much as ingratitude, when shown towards each other. The ungrateful child, or ungrateful friend is justly condemned and despised. But, the ungrateful Christian is little thought of. And yet, who has not been ungrateful here ? Who is not still ungrateful as regards his God and Saviour ? Does not the Samaritan at the feet of Jesus put every one of us to shame ?

E. Really, Mamma, I had no idea how sinful we all are, until I read the Bible attentively with you, and every day now see it more and more.

M. The Bible shows us to ourselves, and the picture there given us must be a faithful one, for it is drawn by God Himself. There we find an account of our disease, and there, blessed be God, we find the remedy. If we learn that we are sinners, we learn also in those blessed pages that we have a Saviour. We are permitted to walk by His side, to witness His acts of mercy, to discern that there is healing with Him. Shall we not earnestly ask Him to heal *our* souls?

We will now continue to trace the steps of our blessed Lord; who, having crossed the river Jordan, passed, as you said, through the country to the east of it on His way to Jerusalem, healing and teaching, as He went, the multitudes that followed Him. It was during this journey that He delivered the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, which we have so often talked of together. You remember which I mean.

E. Quite well; it was about two men who went up into the temple to pray to God; when the proud Pharisee stood and boasted before God how good he was, and thanked God that he was not like the Publican.

M. And you have not forgotten, I dare say, that the poor Publican would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but, filled with a deep sense of his own unworthiness, "smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner!"

E. Yes; and I am sure, if I had been he, unhappy as he was, I would not have changed places with that proud Pharisee. I am sure, Mamma, it must be much better to be even miserable about our sins, than to be

filled with such proud thoughts, so hateful in the sight of God.

M. Certainly, my child ; and far happier too in the end ; for the Bible says, “ they that sow in tears shall reap in joy.” Those that weep for their sins, shall rejoice in the pardon of them. Our blessed Saviour tells us that the poor Publican “ returned home justified rather than the other :” he carried away with him a blessed peace in his heart, which nothing could disturb—the peace of true contrition. I dare say he did not even notice the contemptuous looks of the Pharisee ; for when we feel that God is pleased to approve, it is of very little consequence what man thinks. But for those who trust in themselves that they are righteous, there is no such peace. Peace between God and man can only be obtained from the mercy of God, through the blood of that Lamb, which even the law typified continually for the comfort of the penitent.

And now, Edward, we are come to those sweet verses, which used when you were quite a little child, to please you so much, “ Suffer the little children to come unto me.” It was on this journey that our Lord showed that kindness and condescension to little children, which the fond and anxious parent still dwells upon with so much delight. For there were brought unto Him little children, that He should put His hands upon them, and pray for them ; infants, St. Luke tells us they were, such as your own little sister is. Their friends, most likely their mothers, brought them to Jesus, anxious that they, young and helpless as they were, should have their share of His pity and His love. Nor could a mother’s wakeful affection have thought of any better way of serving her child.

Happy mothers! who would not wish that they could thus take their tender infants, and lay them in their Saviour's arms! Happy children! who, even for one short moment, were cradled there! What a sight it must have been! How touching to every parent's heart! But some there were, who probably were not parents; and, instead of looking on with delight, for some reason or other they rebuked those that brought them.

E. Perhaps, Mamma, they thought they would be troublesome to Christ.

M. Or, perhaps, they fancied that He was too great to notice infants. Yet, what are we all,—what are the oldest and the wisest, the greatest, the holiest of men in the sight of God? What but weak and wayward children? Nay, how many sins have older people contracted from which little infants are free!

But, perhaps, the disciples thought that infants were too young to receive any blessing at our Saviour's hands. Far different, however, were our Lord's own thoughts. He very seldom showed displeasure; but He expressed it very strongly now, at the interference of the disciples. St. Mark tells us, "He was much displeased" with them, for hindering the little children from being brought to Him, and said unto them, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God: and then, he took them up in his arms, laid his hands upon them, and blessed them." The great and wise men of the world may despise these little ones, and think them unworthy of their attention. But Christ looks down upon them with the most tender pity and compassion. He who now sits at the right hand of the Majesty on high, received

children graciously, though some of them, the infants at least, were incapable of receiving any instruction from Him, and could not understand what He said or did to them. But they needed His compassion, His protection, His grace, His blessing. Of this they were capable, and this, through the merciful condescension of Christ, they received, with every outward expression of kindness and love: for "He took them up in his arms, laid his hands upon them, and blessed them."

E. How I love this story! it seems to me now even more beautiful than ever. I wish you would repeat to me now, dear Mamma, those sweet verses, which you read to us all the other evening upon this subject.

M. "The blessed Jesus ever loved to trace,
The innocent brightness of an infant's face.
He raised them in His holy arms;
He blessed them from the world and all its harms:
Heirs though they were of sin and shame,
He blessed them in His own and in His Father's name."

And the hymn then goes on to offer to us the delightful thought, that, as those happy children smiled unconsciously on the everlasting Parent, there were present to His infinite mind all those innumerable infants, who in their cradles have been bought by His most precious blood. What Christian mother does not bless the poet for so beautiful an idea as this? And yet I trust it is not in any degree more beautiful than true.

E. I cannot help thinking, how happy the parents of those little children must have been; I wish all parents could do as they did—that you, dear Mamma, were able to take all of us, as they did their children, to the Lord Jesus Christ, and that you could put our dear little baby into His arms. But I know you will

say that He is quite as kind to little children now, and quite as willing to give them His blessing.

M. We cannot doubt it. Our merciful Saviour, we may be sure, would still be much displeased, if we thought that He would not now receive and bless our little children. Even under the law, infant children, not more than eight days old, were admitted into the family of God. Now the Gospel differs from the law chiefly in this, that it is much more full of grace and mercy; and opens to us more clearly, and more abundantly, the loving-kindness of God our Saviour. It teaches us that, where sin abounded, the gracious mercy of God has been more abundant still. But we know that sin has so abounded, as to make even infants corrupt and sinful creatures; born in sin, and children of wrath; subject to condemnation and death. And does not grace abound still more, when it restores them to righteousness, by placing them under the care of the Saviour of the world? For we cannot suppose that Jesus felt for those children only, who were brought to Him on His last journey to Jerusalem. No; He came to be a blessing to "*all the families of the earth*;" commanded His apostles to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing all; not the men and women only, but the children also. And there is another thought, more encouraging still than all the rest. Our Lord Himself was once an infant; and so sanctified the state of infancy for ever. Then the very first crowns of martyrdom were those which, whilst yet an infant, he bestowed upon the infants of Bethlehem. You have not forgotten, I am sure, those persecuted little ones, whose blood was shed for Christ. They died in one sense for Him, and in His stead;

but He, in a far higher and more important sense, died for them. Yes, Christ died for infants, and therefore they are baptized unto his death; made partakers of the benefits purchased for them there; washed with water outwardly, to show that their souls must and may be washed in his most precious blood, without which, indeed, they would be in a hopeless state. Accordingly, we believe, that baptized infants are entitled, through the merits of Christ, to all the blessings of the Gospel, as soon as they become capable of receiving them; provided they do not forfeit their great privileges by growing up in impenitence and unbelief. Above all they are entitled, through Christ, to the renewing grace of His holy Spirit, to prepare their hearts to receive and obey the truth. For when children grow up to understand these things, it is clear that they must themselves repent truly of all their sins, and believe in Christ their Saviour; loving Him sincerely, and humbly endeavouring to keep His commandments. They must make good with their own hearts, and lips, and lives, the promises that were made for them in their baptism, and be careful never to take themselves out of the arms of their Saviour's mercy, and thus forfeit the blessings of eternal life.

A happy thing it is, my child, to think that you, and your dear brother and sisters, have, in your infancy, been placed in those arms, when you were baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Oh, remember this! remember that, "born in sin, and the children of wrath, you were brought to the waters of baptism, with earnest prayer, that you might undergo that great change, without which Christ

has Himself said, you can never enter the kingdom of God. Remember, that not only your own dear parents, but the Church herself then thanked God that you had undergone this change; that you had been born again of water; and of the Holy Ghost; that you had been adopted as a child of God, and admitted into the family of Christ's redeemed people." Keep then in mind these invaluable privileges, and do nothing unworthy of that gracious and holy relation; but study and pray that you may indeed be a child of God in love and obedience; and lead the rest of your life according to that beginning.

Remember too that the christian child should daily increase in God's Holy Spirit more and more, until he comes at length to God's everlasting kingdom in heaven; whilst even to the last, he must in some respects continue to be a little child;—as teachable, as lowly, as confiding, as free from wilful sin, as indifferent to the pomps and vanities, and sinful pleasures of this evil world. In this sense all of us must be as children. For our Lord has solemnly said, "Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, shall in no wise enter therein."

See *St. Luke* xvii. 11—19; xviii. 9—17.

FORTY-THIRD SUNDAY EVENING.

CHRIST'S LAST JOURNEY CONTINUED.

M. Well, Edward, are you inclined to go on tracing with me our Lord's last journey to Jerusalem?

E. Yes, Mamma, indeed I am ; wherever He goes there is something interesting to hear which He did or said.

M. You are right ; in this journey, as in all His others, His path was strewed with mercies ; and paved, if we may so speak, with heavenly instruction. You will find it so to the end. Yet Jesus knew full well the sufferings and indignities, which awaited Him at Jerusalem : His mind was full of the awful subject ; and there was something mysterious in His very manner, which filled His apostles with amazement, so that, as they followed, they felt afraid. Then He took the twelve, and told them plainly how He should be betrayed, condemned to death, and delivered to the gentiles, who should mock, scourge, insult, and at last crucify Him. So clearly was our Lord aware of every particular of His approaching sufferings ; so steadily did He behold them. But what is to us perhaps most surprising is, that amidst this very people, by whom He was to be thus treated, and led as a lamb to the slaughter, He persevered to the last in instructing them, and showering upon them acts of mercy. No suffering of His own could check His goodness ; no harsh treatment could chill His compassion. Great as were the afflictions with which He was overwhelmed, they were exceeded by the mercies which He continued to bestow ; and though the evil which awaited Him was unexampled, He overcame it to the last with good. What an impressive view does this give us of the goodness and mercy of our Saviour ; of that stream of kindness which no opposition could obstruct ; of that flame of love which

no malice could extinguish ! Though Jerusalem was to witness His death, the people of Jericho, as He passed through it on His way, were still to behold His miracles. In the neighbourhood of that city He gave sight to several blind persons, who, hearing that He was passing by, began to cry, “ Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on us ! ” And though the multitude rebuked them, and desired them to hold their peace, they were not silenced, but only cried the more, saying, “ Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David ! ”

E. I am sure our Lord would not blame them for being so troublesome.

M. So far from it, that He was pleased with their earnest and repeated prayers as a proof of their faith ; and He stood still and called them, and said, “ What will ye that I shall do unto you ? They say unto him, Lord, that our eyes may be opened. So Jesus had compassion on them, and touched their eyes, and immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed him.”

And now we come to a little incident which I am sure will interest you much. As our Lord went on His way from Jericho to Jerusalem, a person of the name of Zaccheus, who lived on the road, “ sought to see Jesus, who, or what kind of person He was.” But the crowd was so great, that Zaccheus, who was little of stature, tried in vain to obtain this blessed sight, and at last he was obliged to run on before them all, and to climb up into a sycamore tree, which grew by the way-side, in order to gratify his wish of beholding Jesus.

E. Into a sycamore tree ? that must be a most beautiful tree, Mamma, if it is like the picture I have seen

of it, in that very nice book from which you have so often given me an account of the productions of the Holy Land.

M. You mean "the Natural History of the Bible." It is a valuable little work, and often helps me to tell you at once what you want to know. You may look there for a long and interesting account of the sycamore-tree; I will only tell you now, that it is very common in Eastern countries, and grows to a great height; that its wood is very valuable for building, and its fruit, in some places, quite a common article of food. Its wide spreading branches afford also a delicious shade; amid them Zaccheus might have remained quite hidden from notice, whilst he himself obtained the sight he so greatly desired; so we see the reason of his climbing up into a sycamore tree.

E. I like him so much for doing that: he must have thought a great deal of Jesus, or he would not have taken all that trouble.

M. What his motive was, we are not exactly told; but from what followed, it seems to have been better than mere curiosity. It was his happiness to see Jesus; but he was happier still in that Jesus saw him, and discovered the very inmost feelings of his heart. For when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him, and said to him, "Zaccheus, make haste and come down; for to-day I must abide at thy house."

E. How very kindly He spoke to him, Mamma, as if He had known him for many years.

M. Thus kind He is to all who seek for Him; fulfilling continually the promise of His own word: "Those that seek me shall be found of me." It is not enough that we should contemplate our Lord Jesus Christ at

a distance ; we must receive Him into our houses : and those who, like Zaccheus, look for Him with sincere affection, may rest assured that He will come to them in blessing both to themselves and to their families. You may imagine with what haste Zaccheus came down, and how joyfully he received his glorious guest.

But Zaccheus, it appears, was a publican, and one of the chief of the publicans : and, you know, how much they were disliked, and how common a thing it was among them to be greedy of unjust gains, and that, in the opinion of a Jew, a publican and a sinner were almost the same thing. No wonder then that the people all murmured when they saw Jesus go into the house of Zaccheus, to be guest to a man that was a sinner.

E. But was he a sinner, Mamma ; I mean such a sinner as they meant ?

M. It is not improbable that he might have made a bad use of his office, and have been guilty of covetous extortion. But, if he had been an open sinner, he was now an open and sincere penitent ; ready to show his return to God by a change of life, and to make up for any wrong he had done to any one, by restoring fourfold what he had taken away ; ready also to spend in acts of mercy those treasures which he had once perhaps heaped up with covetous anxiety. “ Behold, Lord,” he says, “ the half of my goods I give to the poor ; and, if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. Oh that all sinners repented thus ! Oh that each one of us gave such proof that we had left off all our evil

ways ! In the Catechism, you know, repentance is said to be that “whereby we forsake sin.”

E. Yes, and do you remember the hymn which my sister was learning the other day, where it says,

“Repentance is to leave
The sins I loved before,
And show that I in earnest grieve,
By doing so no more ?”

M. All repentance which falls short of this, and contents itself with *merely* lamenting and confessing sin, is not real Christian repentance, but of a worldly sort. It is not the godly sorrow which leads to salvation, but “the sorrow of the world which worketh death.”

See, in the case of Zaccheus, repentance makes him quite a different person. He who had been rapacious, becomes now just; and even generous; he who once was covetous, is now abundant in mercy and almsgiving.

This is true religion, Edward; this is what Christ is pleased with; and thus it is that the lost is found again. “And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.” How encouraging was this language! How happy it must have made Zaccheus! How happy it may make all who seek for the knowledge of Christ, that they may by it be delivered from all their offences, and no longer be a rebuke to the foolish, who, like the self-righteous Jews, make a mock at sin instead of persuading the sinner to repent, and encouraging him to return! Alas! sinners they were themselves, only of a different, and perhaps more dangerous sort!

With the truly righteous there is favour, even towards the sinner, when he is willing to return. Jesus Christ the righteous is full of grace to the penitent. He came to seek and to save that which was lost. He seeks them by His Holy Spirit, He saves them by His redeeming merits. He saw the lost Zaccheus ready to return, and bade him make haste to receive Him, which he did with the utmost joy ; and, what was still better, with abundant signs of a renewed and repentant spirit.

At the house of Zaccheus our blessed Lord delivered a parable on the subject of His approaching departure from this world. Jericho was near to Jerusalem, not more than twenty miles distant ; and the house of Zaccheus, it appears, was still nearer. To Jerusalem our Lord was going, to suffer and to die, as He had told His disciples. Not long before, the Pharisees had asked Him when the kingdom of God should come. Their notions, however, of this kingdom, were low, and entirely of a worldly nature. It was, in their opinion, to be an earthly, not a heavenly kingdom ; a reign over the bodies, not in the hearts of men. Even the ideas of the Apostles seem to have been much the same ; for at the very time that our Lord had been predicting His death, the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, came supplicating our Lord that they might sit the one on His right hand, the other on His left in His kingdom ; meaning, I suppose, to pray that they might be exalted to the highest places in power and authority under Christ.

E. How extraordinary that they should still have thought so much of this earthly kingdom !

M. Yet so it was ; and it is not unlikely that many

supposed that our Saviour was now going to Jerusalem for the very purpose of setting up His kingdom there.

St. Luke says expressly that our Lord's reason for speaking the parable which I have just mentioned, was this ; "because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear. He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive to himself a kingdom, and to return." It was thus Herod went to Italy, to receive the kingdom of Judea from the senate of Rome, and then returned to punish his enemies, and to reward those who had remained faithful to him. But our Lord's kingdom is not of this world ; it is not one which men could either give or destroy. It is a spiritual, a heavenly kingdom. When He compares Himself to a nobleman going into a far country, He foretels His own ascension into heaven, whither He went to receive from God the Father a kingdom and a glory above all earthly power ; yet such a power as in a spiritual sense is exercised even upon earth, and shall hereafter be displayed more openly when Christ shall return at the last day, in all His kingly majesty, to judge the world, to punish His enemies, and to reward His faithful servants.

The nobleman in the parable, when he was about to depart to seek his crown, called his ten servants around him, and gave them ten pounds ; to each servant he gave one, and to each he said, "Occupy till I come."

E. What did he mean by that ?

M. Employ and improve the pound by the time I return. In like manner Christ has bestowed upon every Christian certain especial gifts, to be diligently used now, and by and bye accounted for to Him ; I

mean in that solemn hour, when He shall return to judgment. For instance, He gives us His blessed word, His holy sacraments, His sabbaths, the ministry of His servants the clergy, the advantages of a Christian education, and Christian society. He gives us too the assistance of wise and pious books, and above all He sends His grace into our hearts, to work in us both to will and to do that which is good. Now these great and invaluable privileges are by some prized highly, and used carefully; so their pound multiplies: one pound thus used becomes five, or even ten. They go from grace to grace, from strength to strength; that which they use faithfully grows under their hands. Knowledge is received thankfully into the mind, and there becomes wisdom; sabbaths and sacraments grow into habits of piety, and nourish the soul unto eternal life. The labours of Christ's faithful ministers, the blessings of a holy education, the intercourse of improving society, all these things have contributed to build the Christian up in the faith of Christ, and in that hope and charity which are ever its lovely fruits. And above all the dew of divine grace, without which the heart of man must ever remain barren and unfruitful, is shed down more and more, to soften and refresh the soul, and to cause the fruits of righteousness to spring up in greater variety and abundance continually. Such, Edward, is the faithful Christian, who remembers that his Lord is gone to receive a kingdom, and to return.

But, alas! all Christians are not faithful. Some never think of what our Lord has given them, and of the account which they must give to Him. They undervalue their privileges, or they despise and forget them.

They do not, it is true, like the open enemies of Christ, like unbelievers and apostates, say in so many words, “We will not have this man to reign over us;” nor do they mean any such thing. They expect Him to return; they acknowledge Him to be their king; they even hope to be received by Him. But they forget that it is not enough to say unto Him, “Lord, Lord, whilst they do not the things which he says.” His word they do not read, or, if they read, they do not obey it. His sacraments they never observe, or if they do observe them, it is only in the outward form. They do not discern the Lord’s body in the one; they forget the vows and privileges of the other. Religion, in short, is a thing which they seem to profess, but really they have it not. Or, it is laid up in a napkin, so that, when the lord returns, all they will have to show is the one pound. But, God is not mocked: whatever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. When the king returned and called his servants, “the first came, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds. And he said unto him, Well thou good servant; because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities. And the second came, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds. And he said likewise unto him, Be thou also over five cities.” So exact is the divine judgment. Though all reward is infinitely above our best services, and the rewards of heaven such as are beyond all comparison with our conduct; still there will be a proportion observed, and degrees of happiness or misery awarded in the next world, according as men are faithful and negligent in this; and the reward, though not *for* our works, will yet, through the grace and wisdom of

Christ, be according to them. Though faithful in a very little, we may look for a great reward; and the more faithful we are, the greater it will assuredly be.

But all, as we have said, are not faithful. One servant came with his pound laid up unused, unimproved, in a napkin. He said, though it was utterly false, that his master was hard and austere, one that took to himself the profit of others' labours.

E. But, Mamma, nobody could really say that of Christ.

M. Alas! there are those who thus blaspheme his religion: they would tell you that it is an unjust, and harsh, and gloomy thing. But do not believe them. Even had it been so, the servant ought to have allowed his lord's money to improve; he ought not to have hindered its increase by letting it lie in a napkin. By such neglect he lost even the single pound: it was taken away, and given to him that had ten pounds. What an encouragement to abound in good works! What a warning against sloth and indolence in the great work of our salvation! It is not enough to be *called* servants of Christ, we must *be* so.

The parable ends with the fate of the nobleman's enemies. "Bring them hither and slay them before me," was the awful sentence pronounced upon them. The opposers of Christ and His Gospel may now be bold and high-minded; but, alas! for them when He shall appear. How shall they bear to see the Son of God coming in His glory with all His holy angels? How shall they stand when the King shall say, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels?" Oh! Edward, let us not approach the tents of the ungodly: let us have nothing

to do with the slothful servant. May Christ give us grace to be faithful unto death, that, when He shall appear, we may receive that crown of life, which He has promised to those that love Him !

See *Matt.* xx. 17—34. *Mark* x. 32—52.

Luke xviii. 31—43 ; xix. 1—27.

FORTY-FOURTH SUNDAY EVENING.

CHRIST AT BETHANY ANOINTED BY MARY.

M. We learn from the Gospel of St. Luke that after delivering the parable of the nobleman, our Lord went on, ascending towards Jerusalem, and came again to Bethany, where Lazarus had been raised from the dead. But a short time before, He had removed, you know, from that place, that He might be at a greater distance from Jerusalem ; and I dare say you perfectly recollect the reason He had for doing so.

E. Because from the very day that Christ had performed that wonderful miracle, the chief priests and Pharisees had taken counsel together to put Him to death.

M. For Bethany, being only two miles from Jerusalem, where the chief priests resided, if He had remained there, He must have been exposed to great danger. But the time was now drawing nigh, when Jesus would, of His own accord, offer up His life as a ransom for many. It wanted now but six days of the passover. This was the fourth passover during our Lord's ministry ; the last that He should keep on earth : it was that passover when the true Paschal Lamb was to be offered up, the Lamb of God which

taketh away the sin of the world. Now He no longer tried to hide Himself from the malice of His enemies, although they had actually given commandment that, if any knew where He were, he should show it, that they might take Him. He now came openly to Bethany, and was there received at supper in the house of one Simon.

E. Was that the Simon, Mamma, the Pharisee, I mean, with whom He once dined before.

M. No ; we are told that it was Simon the Leper, who had now the honour of entertaining our Lord, and he had drawn together to meet Him several of those who loved Him very much. There was Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead, sitting with Him at the table ; and the sisters of Lazarus were also present : both as usual employed in doing honour to their Lord, though again in various ways according to their several characters. Martha was still attending to the comfort of our Saviour, waiting herself upon Him ; whilst Mary's love was shown in a very different manner. There was the same difference, as you may remember, between them on a former occasion, when Martha complained to our Lord that Mary had left her to serve alone, having chosen in fact the still better part of sitting at His feet to hear the words of eternal life. And still we find Mary at the feet of Jesus, listening no doubt again to His heavenly conversation, but giving on this occasion still further proofs of her devoted piety. She now anoints those sacred feet with ointment of spikenard, exceeding precious, which she had brought in an alabaster box for that very purpose.

This ointment was of a very costly kind, prepared

from a plant growing in the Indies, and brought at a great expense from that distant country. There it grows in large tufts like grass, and so great is its fragrance, that, when it is trodden upon or otherwise bruised, the air is filled with the odour of it. Amongst the ancients it was greatly prized: indeed it was so valuable that as much of it as could be contained in a small box of precious stone, was considered, it is said, equal in value to a large vessel of wine.

We see, therefore, what respect was mingled with Mary's love. Jesus had treated her and her family as friends; but she could not forget that, in her condescending Saviour, she beheld her Lord and her King; and greatly did she delight in paying to Him such outward honours, as could by any means come within her reach. Behold her then pouring this richly fragrant oil upon the head of Jesus, and anointing with it His feet; and as if that were all too little, employing her own hair in the blessed office; for "she wiped his feet with her hair." So delightful was it to her affectionate heart, to show how she honoured Him who had raised her brother from the dead, and whom she had learnt to look to, for herself also, as the resurrection and the life.

When Mary had thus freely bestowed the precious perfume on the person of her adored Saviour, the whole house was filled with the odour of the ointment.

E. How pleased all those who loved Jesus must have been!

M. Yes, and as the whole party had met together for the very purpose of doing honour to our Lord, one would have thought that they would, all of them, have been delighted at this mark of pious affection

to His sacred person. But, alas ! it was not so, at least there was one, even among the twelve disciples, who murmured at Mary for wasting so much money on Christ, instead of spending it on the poor.

E. Wasting it, Mamma, to spend it on Christ. What could he mean ?

M. I do not wonder that such a word, on such an occasion, seems strange to you ; for strange indeed it is. But there are in the world some wretched people, who look upon money as the best thing which the world contains, and who particularly grudge any thing like expense, or, as they call it, waste of money, in God's service. They will spend it perhaps freely upon their own pleasures and amusements, upon eating and drinking, upon grand spectacles or pleasant journeys, upon fine clothes or handsome houses. Nay, they will sometimes talk very charitably about the poor and their wants ; even spare a little perhaps for them : but any expense for the sake of religion is often, in the eyes of such persons, mere waste. Or, at best, they think that, in religious matters, what is barely necessary will do ; and that there is no occasion to provide for the decency and dignity of divine things. Now just such a person was Judas, though one of the disciples of our Lord. He grudged to our Lord the honour done to Him by the pious Mary ; he looked with an evil eye upon her costly affection, and exclaimed, with an hypocritical pretence of greater charity, " Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor ? This he said, not that he cared for the poor ;" no, we do not often find the irreligious man charitable ; he who is sparing of his money in God's service, is seldom liberal of it

to the poor and needy. It seems that Judas acted as treasurer or steward to our Lord and His disciples; he had the bag or purse, which contained their little stock, and was entrusted with the care of whatever was put into it; and he would have liked that the three hundred pence should thus have come into his own hands. For, sad to say, he was in the habit of taking for himself the money thus given for the use of our Lord, being, as St. John expressly says, "a thief." Hence all his indignation; hence all his pretended care for the poor, the real fact being that he was vexed and disappointed at not receiving from Mary the box of precious ointment.

E. But, Mamma, Judas would not have gained a very great sum, for he says it might have been sold for three hundred pence, and that is not much.

M. Had it been as little as you suppose, it would only have shown us, how unwilling men are to give any thing to pious uses, and how small a temptation will draw away a miser's heart. But in reality the sum here mentioned was a large one. The penny meant is the Roman penny, or denarius, a silver coin, less in size than our shilling, but practically more in value than, being the price of a good day's labour even in harvest time; so that 300 denarii would be about equal to a labourer's wages for a whole year.

E. I see, that alters the case altogether. A hundred shillings is five pounds; therefore, three hundred would be fifteen pounds.

M. Precisely so; and you now see that if this very precious box of ointment was worth even fifteen pounds of our money, there was cause enough for the vexation which filled the covetous mind of Judas:

when he saw the whole ointment poured out upon the body of our Lord, no wonder that such a person as he should have considered it waste. You see too, on the other hand, the piety of Mary; that, like David, she would not offer unto the Lord what cost her nothing.

E. But still Mamma, if Judas had really meant to help the poor, would not that have been right? and would not Mary have been a little to blame?

M. Certainly it is right to feel for the poor, and to be ever ready to help them; but it is also right to be grateful to the Lord our God, and to be ready to honour Him with our substance. There is a time for all our duties; acts of piety have their proper seasons, so have acts of charity also. But let us see what our Saviour thought of all that had been going on. In the delicious odour that filled the house, He seems to have smelt “a sacrifice of a sweet smelling savour;” and when He understood what was passing, He said, “Let her alone, why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work in me; for ye have the poor always with you, but me ye have not always. She hath done what she could; she is come beforehand to anoint my body for the burying. Verily I say unto you, wheresoever this Gospel is preached throughout the world, this also that she hath done, shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.” In this answer of our Lord there was the most unmixed approbation of all that Mary had done; and we can imagine also, that we see some allusion to the remoteness of the country from which the ointment was brought: wheresoever this Gospel shall be preached, throughout the *whole world*, shall be her memorial. As much as to say, “This precious ointment came from a distant country to be

sure, but the Gospel shall spread to a much greater distance, yea, all over the world; so that in India itself, from whence it came, shall the memorial of its being poured on my person be mentioned with honour throughout all generations." You see, Jesus was far from thinking that Mary was in any degree to blame. On the contrary, how graciously He accepts her work of faith and love. Not that He was unmindful of the poor. He speaks of them as always with us, and as having constant claims upon our kindness. The poor need our compassion, and this is one way of showing our gratitude and love to Christ; but there are other ways also which we must not neglect, for Christ expects these marks of our devotion to Him. If we really love Him, we shall be glad to see that His Gospel is maintained amongst ourselves with sacred comeliness and dignity. We shall be glad too to spread it in heathen lands, to assist to the utmost of our power in that blessed work. As Christians, we should ever be forward, like Mary, to honor the Saviour, as well as to feed the poor; and to fill the world with the fragrance of our gifts, even though the worldly minded should call it waste, and the covetous be filled with vexation. Notwithstanding the pretending economy of Judas, and all his murmuring, the name of the devout and affectionate Mary is had in everlasting remembrance. It goes forth, wherever the Gospel goes, into the whole world, as a memorial of her, and a lesson to us; keeping us ever in mind of those good works of piety, which the world may condemn, but which Christ approves.

E. But, Mamma, I do not yet understand why Mary showed her respect and gratitude to our Lord,

in this particular way, by pouring oil upon His feet and His head. Was it not a strange thing to do?

M. It would appear so to us, Edward, but the customs of different countries and different times vary much from one another: amongst the Jews, as well as amongst other nations of antiquity, and we might even add, of modern times, it was a very common thing to anoint with oil. In the Bible we find this practice continually alluded to. You remember, the Psalmist says, that God has given wine to make glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, as well as bread to strengthen man's heart; and when Moses foretold to the Israelites in the wilderness the curses which should follow from disobedience, he mentioned as one, that they should have olive trees through all their coasts, but should not be able to anoint themselves with the oil; for the olive should cast his fruit before it came to perfection. In the prophet Isaiah too we read of the oil of joy; and when our Lord was giving instruction to His disciples on the subject of fasting, He told them not to make a show of it, as the Pharisees did, by disfiguring their faces, perhaps with ashes or other signs of mourning; but "thou," our Saviour says, "when thou fastest, anoint thine head and wash thy face."

E. And now I remember, Mamma, what Jesus said to Simon the Pharisee, when He was dining with him, "My head with oil thou didst not anoint"

M. And you may observe from it that anointing, and especially anointing the head, was a common practice among the Jews, and a mark of respect and hospitality to a guest on receiving him at their tables. Therefore, our Lord noticed Simon's neglect of Him

in this respect, as he thus shewed a want of such common attention as might have been expected as a matter of course. When Mary therefore, in the house of Simon the Leper, poured the ointment upon our Saviour's head, there was nothing unusual in what she did. The only difference in her case was that the ointment was exceeding precious, and that she used it to the *feet* of our Lord, as well as to His head, thinking nothing too costly even for the feet of Christ.

All that Mary meant was to show her hospitality, her respect, her gratitude, her affection, her veneration for Jesus; but our Lord, as we have seen, turned it into a prophecy, and made it a type of His death. He accepted it as a kind of preparation for the tomb; an embalming of His body beforehand for His burial. So graciously does He magnify our poor services, when really done from love to His name, and give them a force and meaning, far beyond their own value, that He may make to Himself an opportunity of mercifully rewarding them. For our most valuable services are fit only to do honour to the feet of Jesus; though when so used in devout humility, they are acceptable to Him, and their fragrance fills the Church.

The anointing of Mary may remind us of that anointing which the high priest of the Jews received under the law of Moses. The costly ointment which she used was like "the precious ointment" which, the Psalmist tells us, was poured upon the head of Aaron, and ran down to the skirts of his sacred vestments. For Aaron was but a type of Christ, who is, in the highest sense, the "Anointed of the Lord;" being anointed with the Holy Ghost and with power as our everlasting high priest. As such He was about now

to offer His body on the cross as, once for all, a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. Thus with His own blood he entered into the true Holy of Holies, that is, into heaven, to intercede for our pardon and restoration to bliss.

May this name, the name of Christ, our dying High Priest and ever living Intercessor on high, be ever precious to us ! May it be deeply buried in our hearts, and embalmed there with the choicest offerings of love and gratitude ! And O that each bosom amongst us, each house, each Church, yea, and the whole world, might be filled with the fragrance of it ! “A good name,” says the word of God, “is better than precious ointment ;” but comparatively there is none good but one, and that is the name which is above every name, the name at which even angels bow—the blessed and glorious name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

See *Luke* xix. 28. *Matt.* xxvi. 6—13. *Mark* xiv. 3—9. *John* xi. 55—xii. 8.

FORTY-FIFTH SUNDAY EVENING.

CHRIST'S PUBLIC ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM.

M. It was known at Jerusalem that Jesus was again at Bethany, and that Lazarus, whom He had lately raised from the dead, was there. In consequence, many of the Jews came to Bethany ; not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might see Lazarus also. For that miracle, the raising of a man to life who had been dead four days, had caused a very great and general sensation. Numbers had seen it with their own eyes,

and all Jerusalem must have heard of it. So extraordinary an occurrence could hardly fail to be much talked of.

E. I wonder whether it led any really to believe in Christ.

M. I think I told you before that “*many* of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen these things which Jesus did, believed on Him.” But on some this extraordinary miracle produced nothing better than mere curiosity, and in others, especially the high priests, it only served to increase envy and hatred, and to lead to more open and violent measures against our Lord, than they had before taken. Indeed these wicked, foolish men even consulted together to put to death again the very person whom Jesus had just restored to life; as if He could not have raised him a thousand times as well as once, or saved him from death as easily as He had restored him to life. But when once men suffer the evil passions of their nature to get the dominion over them, they can no longer hear the voice of reason, or religion, or duty, and it is quite impossible to say where they will stop. Indeed, when men will not believe, but go on hardening their hearts against the truth, we cannot wonder that God should often give them up to their own wickedness, and allow them, like the wretched Pharaoh, to become obstinate in their iniquity. Surely the chief priests must have been quite as much hardened against God, when they thought of sending back Lazarus to the grave, and of destroying Him who had shewn Himself to be the resurrection and the life !

But happily all were not such. There were numbers now present at the feast, especially from Galilee,

who believed that Jesus was the Messiah, and were prepared publicly to show their faith; and many of these, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, went forth to meet Him, and took branches of palm trees and strewed them in the way that He was to go; crying before Him with loud voices and saying, "Hosannah! Blessed is the king of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord!" They went out, you see, from Jerusalem to receive Him, and to conduct Him into the city as their Monarch, their long expected Messiah.

E. And so He was, Mamma, their Messiah and their King.

M. But in a far different sense from that in which most of those supposed Him to be so, who followed Jesus in this His great public entry into Jerusalem. His kingdom was not, as they thought, of this world. He was not, as they supposed, a temporal prince, who should restore to them the throne of David in more than its ancient splendour, and make Israel once again the first among the nations. We must keep in mind this favourite idea of theirs, as it will explain to us much of the treatment which our Lord received at the hands of his countrymen, which would otherwise appear strange and contradictory. At one time they cry "Hosannah to the son of David," at another, "Crucify him, crucify him!" They trusted in fact for a time that this was really He who should "restore the kingdom unto Israel;" and no sooner were they disappointed of this worldly hope, than some of the very persons perhaps, who now led him in triumph into Jerusalem, might be among the first in calling for His death.

And yet Jesus after all was a king ; as a king He made His public entry into Jerusalem ; for so the prophet had said : “ Tell ye the daughter of Zion, Behold thy KING cometh unto thee.” But He was a king of far different kind from earthly princes ; far greater in reality, though far more humble in appearance. When the heathen kings have entered in triumph the capital of their dominions, it has always been, you know, with great pomp and pride, and generally with much magnificence.

E. Yes, I remember the account of the emperor Aurelian entering Rome, when he returned from his conquests. Oh ! Mamma, there was such a splendid procession ! Papa and I read the account of it together, and he told me that it happened about three hundred years after the death of Christ. Do you know, it was opened with twenty elephants, four royal tigers, and above two hundred of the most curious animals from every climate then known. And there was a great deal more, Mamma, which I am afraid I cannot give so good an account of.

M. Perhaps I can help you. Were not those followed by arms, standards, and spoils of many conquered nations ; by ambassadors in their rich or strange dresses from the remotest parts of the earth ; by crowns of gold taken from conquered princes ; and by a long train of illustrious captives ?

E. Yes, Mamma, and among those captives there was the beautiful Zenobia, queen of Palmyra, on foot, laden with jewels, and confined in fetters of gold ; and with a gold chain about her neck so heavy, that a slave followed to support it.

M. And her magnificent chariot came after her,

with two others still more sumptuous, that had also belonged to sovereign princes. Then came the emperor himself in a triumphal car, which had formerly been used by a Gothic king, drawn by four beautiful stags.

Such was the emperor Aurelian's entry into Rome ; for so human pride tries to conceal the littleness of human power ! How different was our Lord's entry into Jerusalem ! Meek and lowly, the King of kings came sitting upon an ass, even upon a colt the foal of an ass, which, though unbroken, became gentle and tractable under His hands. " He whose chariots were twenty thousand, even thousands of angels, thus made choice of the meanest of all beasts to carry him in his last royal journey. Which shall we wonder at most, his majesty or his humility ? the divine majesty which lay hid under so meek an appearance, or the humility which veiled so great a glory ? "

Yet this too was a triumphal entry. It was the triumph of prophecy : for it had been spoken of five centuries before. It was the triumph of miracles : for because of His miracles the people went out to meet Him. It was the triumph of His unseen, but all-present power over the minds of men ; for even the ass's colt on which He rode, was supplied by a miracle. For " when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the Mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples, saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her, loose them and bring them unto me ; and if any man say aught unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of him : and

straightway he will send them." So great was the power of Jesus over the hearts of men.

In this whole transaction there is something very remarkable. You may remember that, when once before the people wanted to take Him by force to make Him a king, Jesus withdrew from them into a solitary mountain. Now He seems to wish to attract their attention, and to throw Himself in the way of those honours, with which the multitude were inclined to receive Him. Prophecy had spoken of His coming to the daughter of Sion, that is to Jerusalem, as her king; and prophecy must be fulfilled. He is accordingly received into Jerusalem as king; as the king of Israel coming in the name of the Lord; yet few perhaps remembered the words of the prophet, or rightly understood what they were doing. Few, I dare say, considered how meek and lowly this king of Israel was; how wanting in all that perishing pomp and splendour of the world: how heavenly and spiritual a king, "higher," beyond all that they could imagine, "than all the kings of the earth."

E. Do you think our Lord's disciples understood it all, Mamma!

M. No, St. John tells us that even they did not comprehend the scene which was passing around them, though they took a share in it, until after our Lord had left them and gone into heaven. So obscure, before they are fulfilled, and even whilst fulfilling, are those prophecies which become afterwards as plain as possible.

E. But, Mamma, what did the people now do to show that they looked upon our Saviour as their king?

M. They spread their garments in the way as a mark of their respect, and in token of their rejoicing and of His triumph they cut down branches from the palm trees and strewed them in the way. For a branch of palm was a token of victory, and was always, in ancient times, carried before conquerors in their triumphs. The procession, which began at Bethany, had gone up the Mount of Olives, and was coming down on the other side, into the valley of Jehosaphat, when a general song of exultation burst forth, and “the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and to praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, Blessed be the king that cometh in the name of the Lord ; peace in heaven, and glory in the highest.”

E. What a delightful sight it must have been, Mamma, to those who really loved our Lord ! but not to the Pharisees I am sure—I wonder whether any of them were there ?

M. There were a few of them among the multitude, who, being much displeased at the joyful shouts of triumph which they heard, said to Jesus, “ Master, rebuke thy disciples.” But our Lord would do no such thing. On the contrary “ He answered and said unto them, I tell you, that if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediatly cry out.”

The occasion had been marked by prophecy as one triumph ; and if men should be silent, then the very earth itself would burst forth into singing, and the stones cry out under the footsteps of the Son of God. The hosannahs therefore continued ; they ascended before the meek and lowly Jesus and were returned by those that followed Him ; or

rather one general chorus filled the valley, and re-echoed from the Mount of Olives. For “the shout of a king was among them.”

E. I suppose for once even Jesus was happy?

M. To any one who had been fond of human distinction such a scene would have been gratifying indeed. How would the heart of an ambitious man have swollen within him as those shouts resounded on his way! But different far were the feelings of Jesus: to Him this seems to have been an occasion of peculiar grief, not of joy. For when He was come near, so as to have, from the heights of the Mount of Olives, a full view of Jerusalem, which lay stretched out as in a map below the mountain, “He beheld the city and wept over it.”

E. Wept, Mamma! I should have thought there could not be any thing sad in the sight of that beautiful city; and at such a moment too.

M. It may seem strange at first sight, that our Saviour should shed tears of sorrow on such a morning as this; and that too, when he was looking down upon the proud towers and innumerable dwellings of Zion; that Zion which was “beautiful for situation, and the joy of the whole earth;” and in whose palaces God had so long been known as a sure refuge. But He did weep, my child, and we must enquire into the cause of those sacred tears¹.

E. Perhaps, Mamma, He was thinking how soon the time would come when all those voices which were now shouting so joyously should be hushed to silence in the grave.

M. No, this would have been too like the feelings

¹ See Christian Year, 10th Sunday after Trinity.

of an earthly conqueror, such as you have read of in uninspired histories.

E. Oh yes ! I suppose, without knowing it, I had Xerxes in my mind ; who, when he was watching his whole fleet and army crossing the sea from Asia into Greece, burst into tears at the thought which God put into his mind, that in a few years he and all the men whom he saw would be dead. But you think the Lord Jesus did not weep for this ?

M. No ; you must think again.

E. Then I will tell you what I think it must have been, the thought of all those bitter sufferings which He was to undergo at Jerusalem. For, you know, Mamma, Jesus knew it all beforehand.

M. He did indeed see the whole before Him, the cruel shame and spitting, the agony and bloody sweat, the cross and passion : He knew full well what that grief was, which neither men nor angels could comprehend. But He did not weep for this : No, He had all this steadily in view from His youth up until now ; He did not shrink from it, but was advancing resolutely towards it. No, my child, He wept for others, not for Himself. Those tears which His own sufferings could not wring from Him, burst forth spontaneously as He gazed upon Jerusalem. “ As he beheld the city, he wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace ! but now they are hidden from thine eyes. For the days shall come when thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee about, and keep thee in on every side ; and shall lay thee even with the dust, and thy children within thee ; and they shall not leave in

thee one stone upon another that shall not be cast down ; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation." Her king had come unto her, just and having salvation ; but she refused it : visiting her with the utmost tenderness, but she would not be won by it. He came to die for her children, but they would not be saved from their sins. Hence those tears which the Saviour shed over that beautiful and infatuated city ! Hence the grief with which *He* approaches her gates, when all around rejoiced !

So extraordinary a procession, as it entered within the walls of Jerusalem, caused the whole city to be moved. As if an earthquake had shaken them suddenly from their homes, the people rushed out to learn the meaning of the shouts they heard. The universal question, as they approached the procession, was, "Who is this ?" Oh ! that they should have needed, after all, to have made such an enquiry ! How plainly would their own Scriptures have told them ! Do you not think that even Moses would have answered that question¹ ?

E. Yes, Mamma, he did tell them that He was "the seed of the woman which was to bruise the serpent's head ;" and "the prophet" to whom they must all hearken, and the "I am that I am."

M. And Jacob, what would he have said ?

E. That He was "the Shiloh of the tribe of Judah ;" and then, Mamma, David would have told them again and again that He was "the King of Glory."

M. And Isaiah would have called Him "Immanuel, Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." Jeremiah would

¹ See Bishop Hall's Contemplations.

have spoken of Him, as “the Righteous Branch,” and “the Lord our Righteousness.” Daniel, as “the Messiah, the Prince who was to be cut off, but not for Himself.” John the Baptist had but lately declared Him to be “the Lamb of God :” and the God of all the prophets had said of Him, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” Yea, even the devils themselves had been forced to say, “I know thee, who thou art, the Holy One of God.” The multitudes too, that now attend Him, are ready with their answer also, replying to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, “This is Jesus, the Prophet of Galilee.” But, well meaning as they were, how greatly did they undervalue their Master then ! A prophet, indeed, He was ; but infinitely more than an ordinary prophet.

Oh ! that the inquiry which the Jews made, had not been one of mere idle curiosity, or prejudice, or alarm. Had it been made in good earnest, they would soon have known, to their everlasting salvation, who it was that now entered their gates.

E. Where did our Saviour go when He first entered Jerusalem ?

M. At once to the temple, surrounded still by the wondering multitude. Their interest had seemed to be at the highest pitch already ; but here it was excited still more, by our Lord’s curing many blind and lame people, who were brought before Him, and who had probably placed themselves at the gates of the temple, to ask alms of the people who crowded to the feast. It is the custom of kings in their processions to scatter *gifts* among the people. *Miracles* were the bounties shed among them by Jesus.

Whilst our Lord was performing these miracles the

people seem to have ceased from their Hosannahs, and to have looked on in silent admiration of His goodness and power. But the little children had now caught the strain, and continued it in the temple, without regard to what was going on.

E. I suppose they did not so well understand the miracles, and were not so much afraid of offending the Pharisees?

M. I dare say not, and therefore they raised the song again to Jesus in the courts of the Lord's house. But the enemies of our Lord were sore displeased. The praises of Christ, though sung by infant voices, made no music in their ears. On the contrary, they were impatient to put a stop to them; and they expressed their surprise to Jesus, that He should permit the little children thus to cry in the temple. But Hosannahs from infant lips are not unacceptable to our Lord. He replied, "Have ye never read, Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?"

He received infant praises in the temple, as the Son of David; He receives them still in heaven, as the Son of God. What is wanting in their meaning He makes up by His gracious condescension, and so gives to their praises, in themselves so weak, strength to ascend where the self-complacent prayers or praises of the Pharisees would never reach. Indeed the more *child-like* our praises are in one sense, the more pleasing will they always be above: the more becoming will they be to the relation in which we stand to God. Compared with the Almighty, my child, the highest angel or archangel is but a lisping infant; incapable of at all worthily uttering the praises of the

Son of God. What encouragement then have children to approach their Saviour ! What pains does He seem to have taken when on earth to show them that He did not despise them ! What marked kindness did He bestow on them ! What honour did He place on the state of childhood by becoming a child Himself ! He might have entered our world at a more advanced period of life : but no, He would be born into it a helpless infant ; He would grow up day by day, and go step by step through the whole period of childhood, that He might feel for little children, that He might know their sorrows, pity their weaknesses, and encourage them by His blessed example to be holy and good.

“ What though, around His throne of fire,
The everlasting chant
Be wafted from the seraph quire,
In glory jubilant ;
Was He not once a little child
Taught by degrees to pray ;
By father dear, and mother mild
Instructed day by day ?
And loved He not of heaven to talk
With children in His sight ;
To meet them in His daily walk,
And to His arms invite ? ”

Oh, what do not children owe to such a Saviour !

The Hosannahs of the multitude ended in those of the children, as if to teach us, that *that* is the most perfect praise on earth, most free from stain of previous guilt, most unmingled with worldly thoughts and cares, which is offered by infants. These children thought not of earthly kingdoms and worldly glory, as the people did : their Hosannahs were simply to the Son of David. Happy the children who, like them, are

found early in the courts of the Lord ! whose voices are early tuned to the praises of their Saviour and their King ! whose hearts are early open to the love of His gracious name !

See *John* xii. 9—19. *Matt.* xxi. 1—11 ; 14—16.

Mark xi. 1—11. *Luke* xix. 29—44.

FORTY-SIXTH SUNDAY EVENING.

FARTHER PARTICULARS OF THE PASSION WEEK.

M. Do you recollect, Edward, the subject of our conversation last Sunday Evening ?

E. Yes, Mamma : do you think I could forget all the interesting things you told me about our Lord's public entry into Jerusalem ? But, Mamma, I have been wondering what the other nations thought of all this. Did they know any thing of our Saviour at this time, or was He known only to the Jews ?

M. We read repeatedly that the name of our blessed Lord was known beyond the limits of Judea, in all the regions round about, and now we are told of some Greeks or Gentile converts who wished to see our Saviour. They had come up, it seems, to worship the Lord God of Israel in that place which He had graciously provided on purpose for such worshippers, in one of the outward courts of the temple ; and hearing so much of Jesus on every side, they felt a great desire, we can easily imagine, to see Him for themselves.

Perhaps they came from the countries north of Judea, and had there heard of our Lord's miracles in Galilee : but however this may be, they now came to Philip, who was of Bethsaida in Galilee, and begged him to help them to obtain an interview with Jesus.

E. I am sure I hope he did, Mamma.

M. Philip, mentioned it to Andrew ; and they both told our Lord how much these strangers wished to see Him ; pleased, I dare say, to bring to their Master a sample of that Gentile harvest of which He had often spoken to them. And Jesus told them that the time was indeed at length come, when the Son of man should thus be glorified. The seed, it is true, was not yet actually sown ; the Saviour of the world had not yet given up His life for the sins of men : not yet ; but the hour was come, as He now told them plainly, when His sacred body, that precious seed ! should be sown in the grave, to spring up again in a little while more glorious, and to become the seed as it were of a boundless harvest, even as a grain of wheat is buried in the ground, and dies for a time, but afterwards brings forth much fruit.

How strange must such language have sounded to these Greeks ! They came to see a King, one who had just permitted Himself to be received as such in the capital of Judea, in the very temple of Jerusalem, with acclamations and hosannahs. But when they had succeeded in seeing him, He talked to them only of dying ; and expressed Himself full of trouble, as if He were on the eve of some suffering, such as had never been known before : as the prophet says, “ Behold and see, was there any sorrow like unto my sorrow ? ” or as He himself at this moment exclaimed, “ Now is my

soul troubled ; and what shall I say ? Father, save me from this hour ?”

E. What then, Mamma, did Jesus wish to give up dying for us ?

M. Ah ! my child, if He had, what would have become of us ? But, no ! this was His human nature speaking, and, as human, shrinking from suffering ; but only for a moment. Immediately He corrects Himself, and says, “ But for this cause came I unto this hour :” and then, instead of praying to be saved from it, He says, “ Father, glorify thy name.” You see He forgot His own sorrows in thinking how His Father would be glorified in the salvation of a lost world.

“ Father, glorify thy name.” But the glory of God should be His glory too, and that not only when His great work should be finished, but now, even now, in the midst of His humiliation. At that very moment “ came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and I will glorify it again.”

E. That voice had been heard twice before : once, you know, when Jesus was baptized, and once when He raised Lazarus from the dead.

M. And again on the mount of Transfiguration. And now it is heard once more bearing witness to the Lamb of God who was about to take away the sins of the world—mysteriously foretelling the triumphs of the cross, by which, as our Lord declared He would destroy the power of Satan, and draw the hearts of all men, both Jews and Gentiles, to Himself. Do you understand me ?

E. I think I do : you mean that people of all countries should be brought to love our Lord Jesus Christ by hearing what He had done for them on the

cross. And is this what was meant when the voice from heaven said, I will glorify my name again?

M. Yes; God the Father had been already glorified by His Son's life and doctrine and miracles; and He would still more be glorified by His obedience unto death, even the death of a cross, by His resurrection and ascension, and then by the glorious outpouring of the Holy Ghost, by which His Gospel should be preached, and Gentiles converted to the uttermost parts of the earth. And the hour when this display of mercy and power was to commence, the hour of Christ's death, was close at hand: it was in effect come.

Though our Lord had not told the people in plain words that He was to die, they seem to have gathered this from what He said, and they were much perplexed in their minds about it. They did not understand at all the idea of a suffering Messiah, and they began to question our Lord about it; saying, "We have heard out of the law that Christ abideth for ever, and how sayest thou that the Son of man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of man?" But our Lord did not see fit at this time to satisfy their inquiries; He only exhorted them to make the best use of His presence among them while it continued, assuring them that they would only have Him "yet a little while." And but a little while it truly was, before He, who was the light and the life of men, should be taken from them. It was already the passion week. It was already the Monday before that awful Friday when the great sacrifice was to be offered up. Our Lord knew it well; He knew how and when He should die: the scene on Calvary was continually before Him; and so great were its terrors, that even He could not

think of them without amazement and trouble ; nor without, as we have seen, almost uttering a prayer that He might be saved from that hour.

E. And yet, Mamma, He was thinking of the people around Him still, and hoping that they would be the better for every moment that He spent among them !

M. Yes ; as if no trouble nor trial were approaching, as if there were no Golgotha nor Calvary at hand, as if no such dreadful scene presented itself continually to his thoughts, our Lord continued to the last to instruct mankind : whilst He was in the world, He was the light of the world still. And these last days in Jerusalem seem to have been more especially spent in teaching the multitudes with which Jerusalem was now filled ; as the sun is often brightest at its setting.

But the day of our Lord's public entry into Jerusalem was hastening to a close : and, escaping from the people, Jesus withdrew out of the city unobserved, and went with his disciples to the peaceful village of Bethany, and lodged there.

E. How wearied He must have been, Mamma, after such a day ! I hope Mary and Martha were there to take care of Him and attend to His wants.

M. No doubt they would have been glad to have done so ; and yet the night at Bethany does not seem to have been given to the Saviour's own refreshment. Perhaps the whole of it was spent in prayer, to prepare Himself for that awful hour which was now so fast approaching.

But be this as it may, we are told that, on the following morning, when our Lord was returning to Jerusalem, " he was hungry : " yes, so hungry, that seeing

a fig-tree afar off, having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon. This tree stood, you see, by the way side, and was no doubt fair to look upon; covered with its beautiful leaves, and appearing to promise that refreshing fruit which they were wont to conceal. For the fig-tree of Judea was never quite without fruit, unless it was altogether a barren and unfruitful tree. Indeed like many other trees in warm countries, it had generally fruit of every growth upon its branches at once—some green, and some completely ripe. But on this occasion, when its fruit might have refreshed the Son of God, there was nothing to be found thereon but leaves only; and “Jesus said unto it, Let no fruit grow upon thee henceforth for ever. And presently the fig-tree withered away.” The breath of Christ destroyed, in a few moments, that unfruitful tree. It withered and died under His sentence.

E. But was not that very strange, Mamma? The fig-tree was not to blame, I think: it could not help it?

M. No, Edward; the fig-tree could not help it; neither could the fig-tree suffer. The sentence was not a punishment of the tree; but it was a forcible method of instructing the disciples, and all who should see what was done, in many important lessons. It was not only a miracle, but a *parable*;—a parable performed instead of spoken. It pointed out, most strongly, the danger of being without fruit towards God. Are not the people of God continually compared in Scripture to trees and pleasant plants? and are they not expected to bring forth fruits of holiness and love? But if they bear leaves only, however beautiful; if they make ever so fair promises and

professions of religion, and show not its blessed effects in their hearts by their conduct and character, must they not expect that, sooner or later, the Saviour's sentence will be pronounced against them, as it was upon this emblem of them, the unfruitful tree? And shall not they too wither and perish under its awful effects? for who can withstand the Redeemer's anger? Who can bear 'the blast of the breath of His displeasure?'

But there were other important lessons to be learnt by the side of that barren fig-tree; and some particularly applicable to all that was going on at that moment. Were not the people around, for instance, taught that He, at whose word the fig-tree withered away immediately, could not want power to protect Himself in His approaching trials, as well as to punish the Jews for their unfruitfulness: when coming to 'the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts which was the House of Israel,' and in particular to 'the men of Judah, His pleasant plant, He "looked for judgment, but behold oppression;" (how cruelly was He Himself oppressed by them!) "for righteousness, but behold a cry," a dreadful cry: "Crucify him, crucify him!" We may indeed look upon this act of our Lord as a kind of prophecy or sign of what afterwards happened to Jerusalem, when it withered away from the roots; its very foundations being turned up. But for the present it was a proof of our Lord's power; that nothing was impossible to Him, that all to which He submitted, He submitted to willingly. It was also a great encouragement to His disciples in the exercise of that wonder-working faith, which He promised to bestow upon them—a faith, as they were now taught, by which they could remove mountains. For "when the dis-

ciples marvelled saying, How soon is the fig-tree withered away ! Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, if ye have faith and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig-tree ; but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed and be thou cast into the sea, it shall be done.” ”

Another proof of His power and authority over the minds of men as well as over the inanimate trees and other works of creation did our Lord give again, Edward, on the same day.

E. I should like to know what that was, Mamma, for the fig-tree has interested me very much.

M. You remember, I dare say, that, very early in the ministry of Christ, He cast out of the temple those that bought and sold in that holy place. This He did again ; overthrowing “ the tables of the money changers, and the seats of them that sold doves ; and saying unto the people, It is written, my house shall be called the house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves.” They dared not, they could not resist Him. Indeed if He had chosen so to exercise His power, not all the people of the Jews, nor yet all the armies of the Romans, could have done Him the slightest injury. In the temple our Lord then remained teaching, as He had done the day before, and as He now did daily until the evening ; the people hanging upon His words with the greatest attention and astonishment. Indeed, so greatly did the people wonder at and admire our Lord, that the chief priests and His other enemies, much as they wished to destroy Him, were full of perplexity, and afraid of taking any steps against Him. On the following day, however, when Jesus

returned to the temple, they came upon Him, having arranged all their measures beforehand, and began once more to ask Him by what authority he taught in the temple, and cast out from that sacred place those who dared to profane it.

E. But I am sure, if they had chosen, they might have answered that question themselves now.

M. They might certainly. Our blessed Lord's works and His wisdom showed sufficiently whence He was, and who had sent Him. As Nicodemus, himself a ruler of the Jews, honestly declared, "No man can do these miracles, that thou doest, except God be with him." But unfortunately most of these rulers shut their eyes against the clearest evidence, and therefore they hypocritically asked Him, "By what authority doest thou these things; and who gave thee this authority?" Now can we wonder that our Lord did not vouchsafe an answer to such questions? He replied, it is true, but merely by another question, which they could not answer, respecting the baptism of John, whether it was from heaven or of men.

E. But surely, Mamma, they did know who it was that sent John to baptize?

M. They knew, no doubt, but they were afraid to answer either way. If they said, from heaven, our Lord would ask why they did not believe him; and if they should say that it was from men, the people, who believed John to be a great prophet, would be ready to stone them. So they answered that they could not tell whence it was. And Jesus said unto them, "Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things."

E. So they fell, Mamma, into the very snare which

they had laid for Christ. I remember it is said in one of the Psalms, "The wicked is taken in his own net."

M. Yes; thinking to perplex our Lord, and to find something of which they might accuse Him, they only entangled themselves, and exposed the malice, and prejudice, and ignorance of their own minds. Surely they should have settled who John was, before they took upon them to question Jesus.

But our Lord's reproof of the Pharisees was not over yet. He took occasion from the mention of John, to point out to them most seriously the danger they were in of the divine judgments. And this He did by speaking to them once more one of those simple but instructive parables which we have so often admired. Let us read the four short verses which contain it, see Matt. xxi. 28—32. Here you see are two sons; one, who at first refuses to obey his father's command, but in a little while sees his fault, repents of it, and goes to work in the vineyard. The other promised that he would go; but, when it come to the point, he went not. I wonder whether we can make out the meaning of it.

E. I was trying to do so, Mamma, in my own mind, whilst you were reading it; but I do not know that I am right. It seemed to me that the son who said he would not go, was like those very wicked people, the publicans and sinners, Mamma, who repented so many of them at the preaching of John.

M. Very well; go on.

E. Then I thought that they, as our Saviour said, were much more pleasing to God, than people who seemed outwardly to be very good, but would not re-

pent and believe in Christ. You see, Mamma, it was those words of our Saviour which come directly after the parable that made me understand it.

M. Yes, they are quite an explanation of this striking story, and a very solemn one too. Let us take care of a mere appearance of goodness. Let us pray that God may cleanse our hearts by the blood and Spirit of Christ, and make them sincere and upright before Him. Let us ask Him to give us that real repentance for all our sins, and that stedfast faith in His mercy through Christ, by which so many publicans and sinners have entered the kingdom of God; and without which none of us may hope for salvation.

See *John* xii. 20—36. *Matt.* xxi. 12, 13, 17—32.

Mark xi. 11—23. *Luke* xix. 45—48; xx. 1—8.

FORTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY EVENING.

CHRIST TEACHING IN THE TEMPLE.

M. I hope you are not tired of parables, Edward, for I have two more to talk over with you this evening.

E. No, Mamma, I should never be tired of listening to the parables of Scripture. What a beautiful manner of teaching it was!

M. Strikingly beautiful, and most profitable too, to those who had their minds set to unravel the sacred meaning.

Let us begin then with the parable of the vine-

yard, which you can read to me, as it is given by St. Matthew. (See chap. xxi. 33—46.)

In this parable our Lord compares the Church of God to a vineyard surrounded on every side, as by a wall, with the providence of God watching over it and preserving it from evil; hedged in by His strict laws and ordinances; with a wine-press in it, by means of which the husbandmen or keepers of the vineyard may convert the grapes into wine. To these keepers or husbandmen, the owner of the vineyard sends his servants at the proper season to receive the produce of the vineyard. For God expects, in due time, fruit from His Church and from every tree in it.

E. Yes, the vines represent the people of God; and I think I see a great deal of the meaning of the rest of the parable. Were not the husbandmen, who so cruelly treated the servants, belonging to the owner of the vineyard, meant to represent the chief Priests and Scribes, who at that very time were seeking to destroy our Lord?

M. Yes; the chief Priests had the care of the Jewish people, both as rulers and teachers. The cultivation of the spiritual vineyard was entrusted to them: and Christ, it is plain, was the beloved Son, the heir of all things, who was at last sent to remonstrate with them, after they had so long refused to hearken to His servants the prophets, who had gone before Him. But Him these wicked husbandmen were determined to kill and to cast out. They shall not do it, however, without warning. Christ here plainly tells them of the dreadful judgments which should follow such wickedness: and He makes them utter with their own lips an awful prediction of the

destruction which should come upon their city and nation.

E. I see ; when our Lord asked them what the lord of the vineyard would do to those wicked husbandmen, they themselves answered, “ He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard to other husbandmen, who shall render the fruits in their seasons.” How strange that they should not see that they were speaking of themselves !

M. So awfully does sin darken the mind ! But the sentence which they were thus led to pronounce against themselves was too true. Christ, the stone, whom they, as the Psalmist had said, rejected, should nevertheless become the head of the corner, and should prove the ruin, as well as the rising again, of many in Israel : breaking those who fell upon it ; and grinding to powder those on whom it fell. So was Christ, you see, rejected by the chief Priests and Scribes, and at last put to death. Yet did He rise again and become the corner stone, the precious corner stone, the tried stone, the sure foundation on which the Church of God has rested, and shall rest for ever. And awful afterwards was the vengeance which fell upon His enemies.

E. I was hoping, Mamma, that such a warning as this might have turned their hearts, and that now, though so late, they might still become disciples of Christ. He had spoken to them so plainly ; now they must, I think, have understood Him.

M. Alas ! from that same hour they tried to lay hold of His sacred person ; and would have done so at once but for their fear of the people. The wicked you know are generally cowards. They know that

the people believed Christ to be a prophet: and a prophet truly He was, signifying to them at this very moment things which should be fulfilled in that generation, to the joy of many, but to the confusion of more.

The next parable which I wish to explain to you, is a very solemn one;—solemn to all, although its first application seems to be to the Jews. Here we find their perverseness in rejecting the Gospel set forth in striking colours. Angry and amazed, the chief Priests and Scribes had just left our Lord in the temple; where, undisturbed by their perverse cavils, He continued quietly to teach the people. The only use He made of their violent conduct towards Himself, was to put it in its right light before the ignorant persons, who were daily witnessing it; if haply they might still take warning.

E. What is the parable called, which He now delivered to them?

M. We know it by the name of ‘The wedding garment,’ the reason for which you will see presently. In it our Lord compares His heavenly Father to a king who made a marriage feast for his son, and graciously invited all his people to partake of it; but they all with one accord began to make excuse; although their king repeated his loving invitations, saying, “Behold I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready; come unto the marriage.” Their excuses were various. One spoke of his farm, another of his merchandise, and all turned away from the feast, which had been prepared and spread for them; and some not only insulted, but even put to death the servants who carried the invita-

tions. I will stop a few minutes, that you may see whether you discover the meaning.

E. Is not the Gospel that great feast, and did not the Jews act just in this way when they refused to partake of it? I am sure our Saviour invited them very often, and very kindly.

M. He did indeed, and great were the blessings, rich the feast which He had set before them; but they contemptuously refused the invitation, and persecuted even to death our Lord Himself, and many of His servants. But such conduct could not pass unpunished. At the close of the parable we see the dreadful destruction which came upon these murderers, and the very city in which such wickedness had been committed. Whilst the feast, prepared for them, was spread before others, more willing to partake of it. The king's servants were sent into the highways and hedges to bid all whom they could find to the wedding, till at last it was furnished with guests.

E. Highways and hedges! what do they mean? I cannot quite make that out.

M. What do you think of the despised Gentiles, who, when the Jews refused, had the Gospel feast spread before them, and were persuaded to accept of it? Not that it is enough merely to accept the invitation: many, many profess themselves to be Christians, who do not really belong to Christ. They have the *name*, but not the *character*, of his followers. Well did our Saviour know that there would be such people in His holy Church—such guests at His sacred feast! Yes, He knew that many would walk among His own people on earth, who would not walk with them hereafter in the streets of the holy city, new Jeru-

saalem—that many would venture even to draw near to the table of the Lord, and put forth unholy hands to touch the sacred feast, the rich banquet of the Saviour's body and blood; many, that would never eat of it with Him in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus describes such persons as these, and warns them of their danger in another part of this parable.

E. Is it where He says that when the king went in to see the guests, he found one that had not on the wedding garment? But was it his own fault? Might he not have been too poor to get one?

M. That is very probable; but it was the custom in eastern countries, for the master of the house to provide the guests with fit garments on such an occasion: he must, therefore, have been too proud, or too careless, to accept of one. At any rate he must have been sadly wanting in reverence for his king. But what is this wedding garment? Is it not that righteousness which God has provided for us in the Gospel; that "fine linen, clean and white," which St. John speaks of in the book of Revelations, even "the righteousness of the saints."

E. But, Mamma, I thought none of us could be clean and white?

M. We cannot, it is true, make ourselves so: but remember David's prayer, "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow:" and remember too, that what St. John says of those whom he saw around the throne of God in heaven: "They had washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." And so shall we be white when our sins are washed away by His blood, and our hearts cleansed by His Holy Spirit. This is the garment God provides for all of us

in the Gospel of His dear Son, even the cleansing of our souls through His blood, and the sanctifying grace of His Spirit; by which we daily put on more and more the garments of holiness and virtue. Let us not refuse it, as too many do! "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord;" without this wedding garment we cannot eat bread with Christ in the kingdom of heaven; for nothing that defileth can enter there.

But let us see what the Scribes and Pharisees were doing whilst our Lord was thus instructing the people. We may be sure that, though they had withdrawn themselves, they had not forgotten their rage against Him. They did not, indeed, venture to approach Him now again themselves, but they sent instead a mixed body of their own disciples and Herodians, who, pretending to be good men, might watch Him, and take hold of some of His words, and find reason from them to accuse Him to the governor.

Though enemies till now, (as you know the Pharisees and Herodians were,) they became friends for the sake of persecuting Jesus! Though separating widely from each other on all other occasions, they could unite in a work of wickedness! Approaching our Saviour with smooth and flattering expressions, (for "their words," as the Psalmist says, "were smoother than oil,") and praising Him for His courage in speaking the truth, they asked Him whether it was lawful to pay tribute to Cæsar or not.

E. I am afraid that would be a very difficult question to answer, Mamma: you know He could not please both Herodians and Pharisees, whatever He might say.

M. It was a very ensnaring question certainly,

and one intended to do great mischief for our Lord. Had He simply answered "Yes," He would have enraged the multitude, who had been listening to Him so attentively; for the people, as I have told you before, hated the Roman yoke, of which this tribute always reminded them. On the other hand, had our Saviour said, that it was not lawful to pay tribute to Cæsar, they could immediately have accused Him to the Roman governor. But they had forgotten the wisdom of Him whom they hoped to ensnare. Though He was about to die, He would not give them the slightest excuse for putting Him to death; though His doctrine was such as offended the people, He would not irritate their minds unnecessarily. It was a subtle snare that His enemies had laid for Him, and I dare say they thought they were now sure of their prey. But Christ perceived their wicked intention, and destroyed their net as easily as if it had been a spider's web.

E. I am so glad! but how did He do it?

M. Calling for a piece of money, such as they used in paying the tribute, the Roman penny of which we have spoken before, "He saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription?" The coin you know, was Cæsar's; and by receiving it among them, they acknowledged themselves, whether willingly or not, to be Cæsar's subjects, and, therefore, were bound to render what was due to him as their acknowledged conqueror and king. "And Jesus answering, said unto them, Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's and to God the things that are God's:" thus putting to confusion at once, both Herodians and Pharisees, who " marvelled and left Him, and went their way."

But our Lord had other enemies still in the infidel Sadducees, who denied that there was any resurrection of the body after death. *They* came to Him also with ensnaring questions, but with no better success : they too were caught in their own net, and brought confusion upon themselves ; so that none of His enemies dared any more to ask Him any questions.

E. It was of no use indeed ; it only showed their own foolishness, and our Saviour's great wisdom. And it was so provoking of them, Mamma, to interrupt our Lord when He was telling the people such beautiful parables.

M. No disturbance could ruffle the blessed Jesus, nor interrupt His sacred thoughts. He immediately continued His instructions, as calmly as if nothing had occurred. Indeed it was now that He pronounced that blessing on the poor widow, which I have often mentioned to you.

E. You mean the poor woman our Lord saw casting two mites into the Treasury. I remember it well : but what was the Treasury ?

M. Besides the stated provision made for the public worship of God, especially at the Passover, it was also the custom among the Jews to make free will offerings, or oblations, for the same purpose, which were kept in a chest, called the Treasury, in one of the apartments of the temple. Here each person might cast in, from time to time, exactly what he could afford or liked to give : a custom which pious persons in all ages have been glad to observe, and for which there will always be abundant room, even in those churches which are the best provided for in other ways.

E. Were these offerings for the use of the poor?

M. No, they were for the use of the temple. They were not *alms*, but *oblations*. Alms are the sacrifices of charity : oblations, those of piety. We give alms, when we distribute to the poor : we offer oblations, when we devote any thing for the immediate service of God. Both are becoming ; both are necessary, but they are different services, which cannot be put in the place one of another. We must give alms, but not instead of oblations : we must give oblations, but not instead of alms.

E. Ah, I remember how much you said on this subject, dear Mamma, when we were talking of the rich offerings David and Solomon made to the house of the Lord.

M. Their oblations were munificent indeed, (for they were magnificent princes,) but, perhaps, not more acceptable to God than the two mites which this poor widow threw into the treasury of the Lord ; for they, as our blessed Saviour said of the other rich people who cast in much, gave “ of their abundance ; but she of her want : for she did cast in all that she had, even all her living.” So much, Edward, does the value of an action, in the sight of God, depend upon the spirit and motive with which it is done ; and so great is the encouragement held out to us by our Lord, to do what we can in God’s service. To men, the gifts of many of us may appear very insignificant ; but God accepts them according to what we have, and not according to what we have not. The reckoning of the temple is not like that of the exchange. Love and devotion are there taken into account ; and when these are added to the gift of a poor widow, or, it may be,

to the gift of a child, they may make it more than the costliest offerings of the rich. It reminds me of what the son of Sirach says: "The bee is little among those that fly; but her fruit is the chief of sweet things ¹." Least among them that crowded to the treasury was the poor widow with her two mites; yet her oblation was chief among the offerings they made,—a sweet smelling sacrifice to the Lord her God.

E. Then, Mamma, I suppose we may learn from this, to give what we can, though it be but very little, towards building a Church or a school, or towards teaching the Gospel to the Heathen? I am glad to think that even I may join in these great works.

M. Yes; the conduct of the widow is set forth as an encouragement and example to all, and happy those who determine to follow it; and happier still those who begin to do so even in their childhood! We cannot learn too soon, whenever we read or hear of any thing good, to "go and do likewise." I should delight to see my dear children's hands early engaged in works not only of charity, but of piety also.

See *Matt* xxi. 33—46; xxii. *Mark* xii. *Luke* xx. 9—47; xxi. 1—4.

¹ *Ecclus.* ii. 3.

FORTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY EVENING.

CHRIST TAKES A FINAL LEAVE OF THE TEMPLE.

M. We have seen, my dear Edward, how many miracles our Lord had performed, not only in Galilee, but also in Jerusalem; and how solemn the instruction which He had for three years been addressing, day after day, to the favoured inhabitants of the Holy Land; and we have seen how for the most part they turned a deaf ear to His divine words. Yet some there were even among the chief rulers, like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, of whom we shall hear by and by, who did in their hearts believe in Jesus, though for fear of the Pharisees they were afraid of openly confessing themselves His disciples. But the time of our Lord's ministry was drawing to a close; and His public teaching was ended with a warning, to the multitude and to His disciples, against the pernicious example of the Scribes and Pharisees. He told them that they must indeed attend to their teaching, so long as they should sit in Moses' seat, and continue to be the lawful instructors of the people; but on no account must they follow their example; for that was condemned even by their own teaching. "Do ye not after their works: for they say and do not." In practice they were sadly wanting, though they made a great appearance of piety, and were proud of being looked up to as the leaders of religion to others, their spiritual guides, and as it were the authors of their spiritual life: so easy is it to make a fair appearance in the eyes of men. Yet with woes, with eight solemn

lamentations for these very persons, did He who searcheth the hearts close His public teaching.

The office of the Scribes made them the most responsible, and when abused, as it was with them, the most guilty, of all the Jews. They had as it were the keys of the kingdom of heaven, but it was only to keep the door shut, neither entering themselves, nor suffering others to go in. Here was one ground of lamentation; and cause for Christ to say, "Woe unto you."

They made long prayers, it is true; but, at the very same time, they were guilty of the worst kind of cruelty; for they oppressed and treated unjustly the poor desolate widow, whom God makes His own peculiar care. For this our Saviour said again, "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites."

They were very zealous to make proselytes and converts to their own views; but it was only to make them worse even than themselves. For blind guides were they at the best, often perverting the commands of God, and making rules rather to encourage sin than to promote righteousness, particularly in the matter of oaths, which they taught the people not only to take, but even to break, without scruple. Again, in trifles they were particular, but in matters of real importance they had no scruples of conscience, straining as it were at a gnat, whilst they swallowed a camel. They made much of outward purity, whilst within they were full of injustice, extortion, and all excess of wickedness; or, as our Lord has put it, they made clean only the outside of the cup and of the platter, leaving the inner part, which is of the most consequence, full of impurity. Like a painted tomb, their religion was fair to look upon, but far

otherwise within; to crown the whole, the very crimes, which they condemned in their forefathers, were practised by themselves. Dead prophets, whom their fathers had slain, they honoured; whilst the living prophets they were no less ready to persecute.

For all these sins did our Lord pronounce woe after woe upon them: as the hypocritical guides of a deluded people, who at this very moment were encouraging Jerusalem to fill up the measure of her crimes, to the utter desolation both of the city and the magnificent temple, from which Jesus was now taking His final departure. Oh, that, in almost His last words, there should have been these awful declarations of the Divine vengeance! Those walls which had so often echoed with the sounds of mercy and loving invitation, can now give back no notes but those of mourning, lamentation, and woe.

E. I am sure it must have been very painful to our Lord to leave that beautiful temple thus, Mamma; very painful to Him, to have spoken there all those dreadful woes!

M. We may be sure that it was, my child; for He delights in mercy, not in punishment. Indeed His heart was so full of anguish at the miseries He foresaw, and of tender compassion towards the unhappy people, who were fast bringing down these miseries on their own heads, that He could not hide His feelings, which burst forth in a most touching expression of His pity and His grief—yes, it was at the moment when He was leaving the temple for ever, and looking down perhaps on the loved but rebellious city, that He uttered those affecting words, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! thou that killest the prophets, and

stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings; and ye *would not*! Behold your house is left unto you desolate! for I say unto you, ye shall not see me henceforth until ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." So deeply did our Saviour love His country! so affectionately, so tenderly did He mourn over its miseries! Remember, this my child; remember that Christ Himself has taught us to love our native land; to love it for our brethren and companions' sake; to love it because of the house of the Lord our God.

E. Oh, Mamma, I am so sorry to think that that beautiful temple was to be destroyed! I was so delighted with the accounts you gave me both of the first and second building of it: it quite grieves me to think that it should be thrown down.

M. How must every pious Jew then have grieved over it! How sad must the prospect have been to every one amongst them who loved his Temple, and his Temple's God! Some feelings of this kind seem to have been uppermost in the disciples' minds at this moment: for just as our Lord was leaving that holy place, one of them drew His attention to the splendour, size, and solidity of its several parts; saying, "Master, see what manner of stones, and what buildings are here!" or, as another Evangelist tells it, "How it is adorned with goodly stones and gifts!" The gifts of ages had been deposited there; the presents of kings and emperors, as well as the offerings of the Jews: and the Jewish historian Josephus tells us that there was hardly any thing more remarkable in this cele-

brated temple, than the stupendous size of the stones of which it was composed. Immense blocks of the whitest marble were used in its structure, some of which were upwards of sixty-seven feet long, more than seven feet high, and nine broad. Well might the disciples call these “goodly stones;” for they must indeed have been wonderful and beautiful to look at. But, alas! neither their strength nor their beauty could save them. Our Lord did not recal, in consequence, the sentence which He had just pronounced against these walls; on the contrary, it only led him to repeat it in still plainer and stronger language. “As for these things which ye behold, the days will come in the which there shall not be left one stone upon another, which shall not be thrown down.” We have often noticed the temple before and dwelt upon the materials of which it was built, and the extreme beauty of its several parts: were it not so, I should stop here to describe minutely to you, in the best manner I could, the richness and magnificence of this glorious building. But you are well acquainted already both with the first and the second temple, and remember well the pains that were taken, not only by David and Solomon, but by the Jews again after the captivity, to render this house in some degree worthy of the purpose for which it was built.

E. Yes, Mamma, I remember it well; but the second house was nothing like the first, I think, in beauty?

M. Certainly not when it was first built; but Herod the Great, in order to please the Jews, pulled down almost entirely that building, which was in a very decayed state, and raised on the same spot a new

building of the most stately and beautiful architecture.

E. But as beautiful as Solomon's ?

M. I should almost think that all the beauties of the old temple were to be found in the third. We read of its glittering masses of white marble, and pinnacles of gold, and are told that Herod spared no pains in endeavouring to restore it to all its former glory. But yet a little while and no traces should be found of what was once so grand, so glorious :—No ; “ not one stone upon another that should not be thrown down.”

E. I wonder what the disciples felt when they heard these awful words ?

M. Their curiosity was excited to the most painful pitch ; and, as soon as they reached the Mount of Olives, apart from the people, some of them asked Him privately, saying, “ Master, tell us when shall these things be ? and what shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the world ?”

E. Then they wanted to know, not only when Jerusalem was to be destroyed, but when the end of the world was to be ?

M. They mixed up, as you observe, together two things, which were to be in the event very distinct, and very distant from one another. As yet, however, both these events were future. But when we recollect, that the disciples were Jews, and like other Jews, devoted to their religion and their country, we cannot be surprised, that they should think that, when their temple should be destroyed, the world itself would come to a close, and the reign of Messiah begin. Our Lord's answer to their enquiry is one of the most difficult passages of Scripture.

E. But, almost all prophecy is difficult, is it not? I know when I open sometimes some of the books of the prophets, though the words sound very beautiful, I cannot understand them at all.

M. All prophecies are, indeed, in their nature dark and obscure, until the time of their fulfilment has come; and since much of what our Lord said to His disciples on this occasion seems to be still unfulfilled, it is still in consequence mysterious to our minds. Most plainly, however, did Jesus forewarn His disciples against the idea that they would soon behold His second Advent in glory. He told them clearly that many impostors would arise during the approaching troubles at Jerusalem, each declaring himself to be the Christ. When the Apostles spoke of the coming of Christ, they probably thought of what the Jews generally expected, "the restoration of the kingdom to Israel,"—the commencement of a worldly millennium, a glorious temporal monarchy under Jesus as their king.

E. But we, Mamma, by the coming of Christ, mean something very different from that?

M. Indeed we do; and Christ soon undeceived His disciples on this subject. He told them plainly, that in the destruction of Jerusalem, He would come in *power* to punish His enemies, and not in *person* to rule among His friends. He told them too, that that awful event would be far from restoring prosperity to Israel: on the contrary, it would be preceded and accompanied by unexampled sorrows. In these His own disciples should have, in some respects, a peculiar share; but then their deliverance should be peculiar also. The destruction of Jerusalem was in fact to be a season

first of general alarm; there would be “wars and rumours of wars,” and dreadful persecutions of the followers of Christ. It would be a dreadful time; the brother betraying his brother to death, and the father the son: yea, and even children rising up against their parents on account of their religion. Yet these melancholy events should be overruled by God for good: for the very persecutions, which should drive Christians to take refuge in other countries, would be the means of spreading the Gospel through the world. The Christians would be persecuted, but the Jews would be destroyed; and the precise evil, which they thought to avoid by putting Jesus to death, would in consequence of that very crime overwhelm them. “The Romans,” they feared, would “come and take away their place and nation;” their holy and beautiful place, their sacred and magnificent temple, and with that their highly favoured nation too. And this is precisely what Jesus had foretold on Mount Olivet. “The abomination of desolation” which the prophet Daniel had spoken of, the feet of heathen soldiers ready to destroy, should stand in the holy place, the sacred ground on which the city was built. Jerusalem should be compassed about with armies, and then there would be no safety but in instant flight from the devoted city; for such should be the affliction, as had not been from the beginning of the creation which God created, nor should be ever after: whilst of the miserable people, some should “fall by the edge of the sword,” whilst others should be “led away captive into all nations.”

E. I have heard, Mamma, of the destruction of Jerusalem, and I know that there are Jews in almost

all countries ; but I never thought before why this was so. I did not know that it was because they had put our Lord to death, and that He had so plainly told them these things beforehand.

M. Yes, Edward : the Jews are a standing monument to all the world of the truth of our Lord's words, and it is remarkable with what exactness the whole of this awful prediction has been fulfilled. But we cannot enter upon this subject to night : we must leave it to another evening.

See *John* xii. 37—50. *Matt.* xxiii. xxiv. 1, 2.

Mark xiii. 1, 2. *Luke* xxi. 5, 6.

FORTY-NINTH SUNDAY EVENING.

JUDGMENT OF JERUSALEM.

M. Perhaps you would like to night, Edward, to dwell a little more upon the subject of our conversation last Sunday, and observe with me how the different parts of our Lord's prophecy were fulfilled ?

E. I should indeed, Mamma : though I am almost afraid to hear of the sufferings of the Jews ; they must have been so dreadful ! But where is it we learn how these things were fulfilled, for I do not think it is in the Bible ?

No : Scripture gives the prophecy ; but the history of its fulfilment was written not even by a Christian, but by a Jewish historian of the name of Josephus. He was first of all the Jewish governor of Galilee, and then a prisoner of the Romans, during the very war in which Jerusalem was destroyed, and of which

[*Second Series.*]

he has left us a particular account. His history is very valuable; for in it we have a Jew bearing witness to the truth of our Lord's predictions against his own capital and temple. I cannot give you the whole of his testimony; for that would be only to repeat his history of the Jewish war, which must be left till you can read it for yourself. We will, however, notice a few of the more striking points.

E. Thank you, dear Mamma; and first will you tell me whether the temple was really so thoroughly destroyed, that not one of those goodly stones was left one upon another?

M. It is remarkable that this prediction was fulfilled to the very letter, and even against the wishes of Titus, the commander of the Roman army, who accomplished this work of Divine vengeance. But I will read to you what a learned bishop of our Church has collected together on this point. "The temple," he says, "being a building of such vast strength and grandeur, was likely to be preserved, as it was worthy to be preserved, for a monument of the victory and glory of the Roman empire. Titus was accordingly very anxious to preserve it, and protested to the Jews who fortified themselves in it, that he *would* preserve it even against their will. He had wished to save the city too, and sent Josephus and other Jews, again and again, to their countrymen to persuade them to give it up to him quietly. But an overruling Providence directed things otherwise. The Jews themselves, rather than give up their temple to their heathen conquerors, first set fire to its porticos themselves; then the Romans did the same. One of the soldiers, neither waiting for any command nor

trembling for such an attempt, but urged as it were by a preternatural impulse, threw a burning brand in at the golden window, and thereby set fire to the buildings of the temple itself. Titus ran immediately to the temple and commanded his soldiers to extinguish the flames: but neither exhortations nor threatenings could restrain their violence. They either could not, or would not hear; and those behind encouraged those before to set fire to the temple. He then turned his thoughts to the holy place: this he was so anxious to preserve that he commanded his soldiers even to be beaten for disobeying him; but their anger, and their hatred of the Jews, and a certain vehement warlike fury, overcame for once their reverence of their general, and their dread of his commands. A soldier in the dark set fire to the doors, and thus, as Josephus relates, the temple was burnt against the will of Cæsar."

E. For it was the will of one greater than Cæsar. O Mamma, how wonderful all this is! But I little thought, when you were giving me such an interesting account of the building of the second temple, that I should ever hear so melancholy a one of its destruction. I remember your telling me that some of the old Jews wept when they saw the second temple, because they were thinking of the first. How much more would they have wept could they have seen all this! But please to go on, Mamma.

M. I must go on with the good bishop's account then. He tells us that, after this, Terentius Rufus, who was left to command the army at Jerusalem, did with a ploughshare plough up the foundations of the temple. Thereby was literally fulfilled our Lord's

prophecy, that there should not be left one stone upon another, and at the same time those words of Micah, "Therefore shall Zion for your sakes be ploughed as a field." Eusebius too, an historian of the Church who lived about three hundred years afterwards, affirms "that the temple was ploughed by the Romans, and that he saw it lying in ruins."

E. And the city, Mamma?

M. It shared the same fate, being burnt and destroyed as well as the temple. Of this you may read most interesting and full accounts by and bye. I shall now notice to you another circumstance predicted by our Lord, which was the rising up, during the troubles of Jerusalem, of many false prophets, and many who should pretend to be the very Christ. "Many," said our Lord, "shall come in my name, saying, I am the Christ, and shall deceive many." To show you how this was fulfilled, I will read you another passage from the same learned writer. "Within a little time this part of the prophecy began to be fulfilled. For very soon after our Saviour's decease, appeared Simon Magus, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: to whom they all gave heed from the least to the greatest, saying, 'This man is the great power of God.' He boasted Himself likewise among the Jews as the Son of God—and there were several more beside Him." I pass over several other particulars expressly foretold by our Lord and most strikingly fulfilled, leaving them for your own perusal, when you shall be able to enjoy the delightful book from which I have now been reading to you—Bishop Newton's excellent and interesting work upon the prophecies. But, perhaps,

you would like to hear the end of all, as regards the Jews and the Christians.

E. Yes, Mamma. You said, I think, that the Christians were to be sadly persecuted, but strangely delivered. Do tell me how this was fulfilled.

M. We learn, Edward, even from the acts of the Apostles, how soon and how grievously the Christian Jews began to be persecuted; and that in most exact fulfilment of our Saviour's words. He said, for instance, to the Apostles, "Before all these things," that is, before the signs which should go before the destruction of Jerusalem, "before all these things they shall lay their hands upon you," and again, "they shall deliver you to the councils." Now turn to the fourth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, and read the first seven verses.

E. "And as they spake," &c. But of whom is this said, Mamma? Who were the persons who were set in the midst of the council?

M. It appears that they were the Apostles Peter and John, who are mentioned by name as two of the four who asked Jesus privately that question respecting the overthrow of the temple, which led to the solemn prophecy that we have been considering. It was then added respecting the Apostles, that they should be delivered into prisons, should be afflicted, should be beaten in the synagogues, be brought before rulers and kings: nay that some should be put to death. Now in the Acts we read of the imprisonment of St. John, St. Peter, and St. Paul. St. Paul repeatedly, in his Epistles, tells us of his afflictions; and indeed the whole lives of the Apostles were for the most part but a series of trials: so that if in this life only they had

enjoyed a hope in Christ, they would have been of all men most miserable. The same St. Paul was five times beaten by the Jews, besides being beaten thrice in heathen places, as he expressly tells us himself in a passage¹ of his Epistles, which is indeed a striking comment upon our Saviour's prophecy.

But with the prophecy of suffering, there was a prophecy also of deliverance. "He that shall endure unto the end," said our Saviour, "the same shall be saved;" and, "there shall not an hair of your head perish." And so in the accounts we have in the Bible of the persecutions of the disciples, we read continually of their deliverance out of them: even angels are sent to rescue them, as in the case of St. Peter and St. John; an earthquake opens the prison doors, as in the case of St. Paul and Silas; and deliverance is extended in the midst of the flames, as in the wonderful case of St. John, not to speak of the extraordinary preservation continually of St. Paul, and I dare say of many of the disciples, among all those different perils which he so eloquently describes.

But beyond all it is a most remarkable fact that none of the Christians perished in the destruction of Jerusalem. Our Lord had particularly told His disciples, that, when the miseries which He foretold should come upon Jerusalem, they were to flee into the mountains; and this advice was wisely remembered by the Christians when His words came to pass. We are told by Josephus of the numbers that fled whilst these terrors were coming on. We learn also from the historians of the Church, that when Vespasian approached Jerusalem with his great army, all who be-

¹ 2 Cor. xi. 23—27.

lieved in Christ left the city and removed to Pella and other places beyond the Jordan ; so that they all marvellously escaped the general shipwreck of their country. Indeed there is every reason to believe that not so much as one of the Christians perished in the destruction of Jerusalem !

E. How wonderful, Mamma ! But I fancied that Jerusalem was encompassed with armies.

M. So she was : and yet the providence of God ordered it so that the Christians should escape. Several times the Roman generals drew off their forces, and departed at the very moment that they were expected to take the city by storm. Sometimes one event at Rome, and sometimes another led to this, as you will read more fully by and bye ; but so it was, for so God ordered it ; because not one hair of a Christian's head might perish. These delays were most gracious opportunities afforded to the Christians for escape. Indeed they seem evidently to have been made on purpose for them. For after they were gone, Titus built such a wall around the city that it became quite impossible for a Jew to escape. No one could go in or out, unknown to the enemy. So you see we do not want encouragement to serve God, and then to trust in Him to take care of us. How safe are those whom He defends !

E. David was quite right when he said : “ He that dwelleth in the defence of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. A thousand shall fall beside him, and ten thousand at his right hand, but they shall not come nigh him.”

E. I see that our Lord's prophecy, not only of suffering but deliverance, was indeed fulfilled ; now will

you tell me how they were brought before rulers and kings for his sake?

M. If we turn to the Acts of the Apostles again, we shall find St. Peter and St. John testifying of our Lord Jesus Christ, and preaching salvation through His name before the Jewish rulers and elders, and Scribes at Jerusalem. So was St. Paul brought for the same cause before the council at Jerusalem and then before the Roman governors Felix and Festus, and before king Agrippa at Cæsarea, and afterwards at Rome itself before the Emperor Nero.

E. And I think our Lord said that some should even be put to death for His sake?

M. He did; and in the Acts we read, very soon after His own departure, of St. Stephen's martyrdom; then of the death of James, the brother of John, whom Herod the king, in order to please the Jews, killed with the sword. And we are told, by uninspired historians, that all the Apostles were among "the glorious martyr train," excepting St. John; and even he escaped, as I said just now, only by miracle: he was thrown into a cauldron of boiling, or rather of burning oil, from which he was wonderfully delivered by divine providence, as Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego were out of the fiery furnace, without any injury whatever.

E. But, Mamma, if the Apostles and their companions were so cruelly treated, I wonder that the Gospel spread at all in the world. I should have thought people would have been afraid to become Christians with such frightful things before them.

M. So it would seem at first sight, Edward: but the peculiar sufferings of the Apostles were in a manner marks that they were really Apostles of

Jesus Christ. At least they were strong and clear proofs, that they had no worldly motive for all they said and did; that they really believed what they taught, and lived themselves for that eternal life which they proclaimed to the world, that God had given to men in His Son Jesus Christ. When Jews and Heathens saw them give up every thing in this world, and submit to suffering of every kind and degree, for the sake of the Gospel, they must have begun to think that there was some truth in that Gospel; something in it worth living, and even worth dying for. They must have wondered too at the victorious patience with which they bore tortures of every kind; and have suspected that it was more than human, and that God was with them of a truth; especially as these were calm and quiet men, rather "slow to believe" than otherwise; attentive to all the regular duties of life; not hurried away by wild enthusiasm, or disorderly feelings; not intoxicated with human learning, but speaking as, St. Paul maintained, "the words of truth and soberness." Then we must remember that these same holy, enduring, indefatigable, and self-denying men wrought miracles, and that by their hands wonderful gifts were bestowed on those that believed; the Holy Ghost accompanying their preaching continually with outward and visible signs of His presence and favour. And thus the persecutions, which were intended to check the Gospel, were the very means of spreading it on every side.

E. Yes; I remember now, it was so at the time of the Reformation. You know, when we read the account of it, you told me that when people saw how bravely and calmly the martyrs died in the flames,

singing praises to God all the time, they began to think that there must be something very good and great in their piety ; and then they began to read the Scriptures for themselves.

M. You are quite right ; that explains to you how it had been before in the days of the Apostles. Men saw, admired, and believed. Oftentimes the very persecutors themselves, or at least the soldiers and officers employed to put the Christian to death, were converted through his example and died with him. The grace which supported the Apostle, touched the heart of his hearers ; and thus amidst crosses, and flames, and torments, and blood, the church of Christ spread and triumphed. Our Lord's prophecy too was fulfilled, that the Gospel opposed as it was by all that was dreadful, or violent, or mighty, should be published unto all nations even before the destruction of Jerusalem. And thus was the justice of the sentence made manifest by which that city was overthrown, in which the Son of God had been crucified.

E. And did all nations become Christian before Jerusalem was destroyed ?

M. No ; that does not seem to have been the meaning of the prophecy ; but merely that the Gospel should be *carried* into all nations then known, not that it should be received by them all : and in this sense it was fulfilled, as we learn from the early writers of the Christian Church.

E. You do not mean the Acts of the Apostles, do you ?

M. That is the first, and earliest, and most important history which we have of the Apostolic Church ; being written by an inspired penman, St. Luke. But

we have other writings, which, though left us by men uninspired, are still to be received with reverence, as the works of holy and learned men, who, living in or near those early times, must be the best human authority for the history of them. All that we call 'History' depends, you know, upon the accounts of uninspired writers, some of whom were not by any means good men; and yet we believe them. Surely then we ought to receive with respect the histories left us by the first Christian bishops and doctors, even though they were not inspired, as the Apostles and Evangelists certainly were. "The Acts of the Apostles, indeed contain only a small part of the history of a small part of the Apostles; and yet even there we see that the Gospel was very widely spread, and had taken root in the most important parts of the Roman Empire. As early as the reign of Nero (A.D. 65.) the Christians were grown so numerous at Rome as to alarm the government; the first general persecution was begun against them merely on this account; although it was pretended that they had set fire to the city. Clement, who was a fellow labourer with St. Paul, tells us that the Apostle preached both in the east and in the west; that he taught the whole world righteousness, and travelled as far as the utmost borders of the west. It appears also, from the writers of the history of the Church, that before the destruction of Jerusalem, the Gospel was not only preached in the lesser Asia, and Greece, and Italy; but that it spread as far northward, as Scythia; southward, as Ethiopia; as far eastward, as Parthia and India; to the west, as far as Spain and Britain."

E. Britain, Mamma ! I thought the Romans brought it here.

M. But they were not the first to bring it. It seems very probable that it was preached in our island by St. Paul himself ; at any rate, that it was planted in this spot so dear to us in the days of the Apostles, and that before the destruction of Jerusalem. But our conversation has already been longer than usual, and must come to an end now. Next Sunday I shall hope to continue the same subject.

See *Matt.* xxiv. 3—22. *Mark* xiii. 3—20.

Luke xxi. 7—23.



FIFTIETH SUNDAY EVENING.

JUDGMENT OF JERUSALEM (*continued*).

E. You told me last Sunday, Mamma, of the destruction of Jerusalem : but was it never built up again ?

M. Not by the Jews, Edward : for the place, their “holy place,” was “taken away” from them by the Romans ; and their “nation” too was “taken away” by the same enraged conquerors, either by the sword or else by captivity. “They shall fall,” said Christ, “by the edge of the sword,” and the number of those who were thus taken away is almost incredible. Josephus has reckoned the number that fell by the sword in different places of Judea, during this dreadful war : and they amount altogether, besides many who could not be reckoned, to no less than one million, three

hundred and fifty-seven thousand, six hundred and sixty ! Yet, as bishop Newton tells us, the number of the captives too was very great.

E. For, you know, our Lord had said, “ They shall be carried away captive into all nations.”

M. Yes ; and Josephus tells us that “ the number of the captives taken in the whole war amounted to ninety-seven thousand ! Some of these were sent to labour at the public works in Egypt ; others underwent a still more cruel fate, eleven thousand of them perished from want ! But the chief part were destroyed by wild beasts in the theatres or public shows throughout the Roman provinces ; being made to fight in troops with one another for the amusement of the people, and thus to perish by each other’s hands.”

Yet these were the people whom the Lord Jesus would once have gathered together with all the tenderness of a parent ! How often had they afterwards cause to wish that they had indeed been gathered under His Almighty wings ! How safe the shelter which they would have found there ! Oh ! that they could but have taken refuge beneath them, until all these calamities were overpassed ! But they *would not*, when they might ; and now it was too late.

Such was the miserable end, my dear child, of those who had opposed and put to death the Son of God ; and if it had not been that, for the sake of the Christian Jews, the Lord “ had shortened those days,” those dreadful days, the whole people would have been consumed, “ no flesh would have been saved.” But, “ for the elect’s sake,” for the sake of His own little flock, the Lord did shorten those days : nevertheless the

nation was altogether broken up, and scattered over the earth.

E. And what became afterwards of Jerusalem?

M. After prophesying the slaughter of the Jews, and the carrying them away captive, our Lord added, "And Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles." And Jerusalem has never since been in the possession of the Jews; but has constantly been in subjection to some other nation; first of all to the Romans, in the second place to the Saracens; then to the Franks, afterwards to the Mamalukes, and now to the Turks. Once it was the delight of the pious Israelite, as he entered the gates of the favoured city on the great festivals, to exclaim, in the joyful language of the Psalmist, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord. Our feet shall stand in thy gates, O Jerusalem!" For Jerusalem was then "built as a city that is compact together: beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole land was Mount Zion:" for in those happy days she was "the city of the God of Israel, the mountain of His holiness;" and thither the tribes went up on the solemn feast days, "even the tribes of the Lord, to testify unto Israel" their communion in the national religion, and "to give thanks unto the name of the Lord." Such was Jerusalem once. But how mournful was the change, when the Jews had rejected, despised, and crucified the Lord from heaven! Then "wrath came upon them to the uttermost" and "the hand of the Lord was against the city:"—against His own city, whose very "gates He had once loved more than all the dwellings of Jacob,"—with a very great

destruction. Impregnable she had once been ; not indeed in her mountains, though they did stand round about her ; nor yet in her bulwarks and towers ; but in her God : for “the shields of the earth belong unto God,” and He was “known in her palaces as a sure refuge.” I dare say you can give me some instances of this.

E. Do you mean in the days of the good king Hezekiah, when the proud Sennacherib came all round Jerusalem with an immense army. I remember all that well, and how Hezekiah placed his strength in God, praying earnestly to Him in his distress.

M. And you remember, no doubt, how he kept his own mind, and the minds of his people steadfast in the Rock of their salvation. And how “the daughter of Zion,” was able then to despise her enemies, and to “laugh them to scorn.”

E. Indeed I do ; the destroyer was not permitted to enter the city, nor even to shoot an arrow there, nor to come before it with shields.

M. How different was it in the time of the Roman invasion ! “The abomination of desolation,” the feet of enraged idolaters, “swift to shed blood,” stood within the gates of Jerusalem, stood within the very courts of the Lord’s house, stood within, nay, they stood not, but trampled down the very temple. So that Titus himself when he came again to Jerusalem, not long after his conquest of it, “and beheld the sad devastation, and called to mind its former splendour and beauty, could not help lamenting over it,” and deploring the cruel necessity of destroying such a city. So complete, indeed, was the desolation, that Eleazar

said to his countrymen, "What is become of our city, which was believed to be inhabited by God. It is rooted up from the very foundations, and the only monument of it that is left, is the camp of those that destroyed it, pitched upon its remains."

E. But was it never built up again?

M. It was in a manner rebuilt, but *not by the Jews*. Great and many have been the changes and chances, to which Jerusalem has been subjected, since its destruction by Titus; but in none have the Jews been able to recover the possession of their ancient city. The Gentiles, that is, other nations, different from the Jews, have each in its turn had possession of the holy place, and have all, by their manner of treating it, verified most strikingly our Lord's prophetic words, that it should be "trodden down." Romans, Greeks, Persians, Arabians, Turks, Egyptians, Franks, Moguls, Tartars, Mamalukes,—have, at different times, possessed Jerusalem—but the Jews never!—The holy place has been trampled on by Gentile feet; but the Jews have no possession there, though they have made repeated attempts to obtain it: indeed they have been, for the most part, actually forbidden to enter it, or even to approach the city. But I will endeavour to give you a short account of the history of Jerusalem since its destruction, such as learned men have collected out of ancient writers.

E. Thank you, dear Mamma, I was hoping that you would; for I have only a confused idea now in my head of Romans, Greeks, Persians, Arabians, Tartars, and all those other nations that you mentioned just now.

M. I am glad to find that you like to have clear ideas of things; and I will make this as plain and easy to you as I can.

Jerusalem was destroyed, by the Romans, seventy years after the birth of Christ. Sixty years after that, it was rebuilt by the Roman emperor Ælius Adrian, who called the city after himself by the name of Ælia. On this occasion the Jews rebelled against their Roman masters, in order to regain the holy place, and probably did obtain it for a short time; but it was only to bring down upon themselves another overthrow more dreadful than that inflicted by Nebuchadnezzar, or even by Titus. The new city was retaken by the Romans, and entirely destroyed. The Jews were slain with a terrible slaughter; Judea was almost desolated; and of the people who survived, an incredible number were scattered over the face of the earth. The city was rebuilt, but only as a Roman colony; the Jews being expressly excluded from it; and their religion insulted by the erection of the marble statue of a hog over one of the gates!

In this state Jerusalem continued, not as a Jewish, but as a *Roman* city, under the name of Ælia, until the reign of the first Christian emperor, Constantine the Great. At that time the very name of Jerusalem was grown into such disuse, that it was very little remembered among the heathen. Bishop Newton mentions an extraordinary proof of this: he tells us that a martyr from Palestine was asked from what country he came, and when he answered 'Jerusalem,' neither the governor of the province nor any of his assistants could understand what city he meant, or where it was situated.

E. Is that possible, Mamma? Surely they might have read or heard something of so famous a city.

M. If they had been Christians, Edward, or acquainted even with the Jewish Scriptures, they must have known something of Jerusalem, as every child in a Christian country does: but the Roman governors, you must remember, were still heathens, unacquainted with the Holy Scriptures; knowing little, and caring less, what had been the ancient state of Palestine. I say its *ancient* state; for already two centuries had elapsed since Jerusalem had been destroyed, and another city, under a different name, built upon the spot where it had stood: no wonder then that a heathen soldier should be altogether ignorant about it. But, in the time of the first Christian emperor, Jerusalem recovered the name, once so dear to the people of God; and Constantine showed his respect for the place, by causing it to be enlarged and adorned with many stately edifices and beautiful churches, so as to make it quite a Christian city.

E. I shall always love Constantine for that: how pleased the Jews must have been!

M. I am sorry to say that the making it a *Christian* city was more unwelcome to them, than even if it had continued heathen. They still held the name of Christ in contempt; and they now tried hard to recover Jerusalem, and to rebuild their temple; but with no better success than before. The attempt only ended in their being cruelly punished, marked as rebels, and dispersed over the empire as fugitives, or slaves.

E. I am sorry for them; it was so natural that they should wish to build their temple. But did Jerusalem continue to be a Christian city?

M. For three centuries Christians had the disposal of it, and the Jews were forbidden to come near it; for the hand of the Almighty was still laid heavily on this unhappy people, correcting them sorely for their sins. Not long after Constantine's death indeed an attempt was made by the emperor Julian, to defeat the prophecy respecting Jerusalem, by restoring it to the Jews, and rebuilding their temple for them.

E. Defeat the prophecy, Mamma! was not that very wicked?

M. Wicked it was; and vain as it was wicked. But Julian, though a nephew of Constantine, had forsaken Christianity, and fallen back into heathenism. He is therefore called in history 'Julian the Apostate.' This accounts for his wicked presumption.

E. And what prevented him? I know it could not be done, when our Saviour said it should not; but I should like to know by what means it was prevented.

M. It will detain us a little; but the circumstances are so remarkable, that we must, I think, dwell upon them for a few moments. The unbelieving emperor, it seems, had fixed his mind very intently upon this unholy work. He gave the charge of it to his chief friend Alypius, and he was warmly supported by the governor of Palestine; whilst, at the call of Julian, the Jews assembled readily, as you may suppose, from all parts of the empire, to accomplish what has been in every age their ruling passion, the rebuilding of the temple. Julian himself was not there, for he was engaged in a Persian war: on his return from which he intended to take an active part in this great

work. But what are man's intentions ! From that war Julian never returned. He received his death wound from a Persian javelin ! Meanwhile this presumptuous attempt to rebuild the temple had been interrupted in a still more extraordinary manner.

Whilst Alypius and the governor of Palestine were pushing on the work as fast as possible, dreadful balls of fire burst forth continually from the earth around the foundations, and made it impossible for the men to go on ; for they were repeatedly burnt by them, whenever they made the attempt.

E. Then it was interrupted by a miracle ?

M. Yes ; rather than that prophecy should be defeated, a prodigy was wrought ; and this is told us by a heathen writer. How little did Julian think that, in attempting to make our Lord's words false, he was only preparing so wonderful a proof that they were the words of Him who cannot lie ! But so it is, that the Lord on high restrains the fierceness of unbelieving men, and turns it to His own praise. But I must try now to carry on the history of Jerusalem a little farther.

Soon after the death of Julian, who was the last heathen emperor, the Roman empire became divided into two parts, the eastern and western ; or as they are sometimes called, the Greek and the Roman. Jerusalem came then into the hands of the Greek emperors, who reigned at Constantinople ; and the Jews had not the liberty of even approaching the city : and this continued for nearly three hundred years, or till the beginning of the seventh century after Christ. Then the city was taken by the Persians ; and afterwards it fell into the hands of the Saracens,

who were the first followers of the false prophet Mahomet. They took possession of it under the command of their governor or Caliph Omar in the year 637.

E. How grieved I am to think that it should be again in such unholy hands ! This was “the abomination of desolation,” I think, once more.

M. Indeed it was, for on the very spot, where the temple of the Lord had once stood, Omar built a Mahomedan temple, or mosque. In the hands of the caliphs Jerusalem continued for more than four centuries; when it passed for a short time into those of the Turks, who had then established themselves in Persia. But the caliph of Egypt soon wrested it from them ; and it then became an object of deep interest to all the Christian Churches of Europe.

E. Ha ! Mamma, I think you are coming now to the crusades, and Richard the Lion-hearted.

M. I am, my child; and it was, as you know, a most memorable period of history. You have read so much about this in the history of our own dear country, that I need not dwell upon it now. I will only remind you that the crusades, or holy wars, as they were called, proceeded professedly from a religious zeal, among the Christian princes of Europe, to recover Jerusalem under the banner of the cross from the hands of the Mussulmen.

The army of the first crusaders amounted to three hundred thousand fighting men at the least. Perhaps you have not read that they fought their way to Jerusalem, and took it in the year 1099 ; putting to the sword all who were not Christians. Seventy thousand Mussulmen were massacred, and all the Jews that were found there gathered together and burnt.

E. And was that *religious* zeal, Mamma? surely that could not have been right?

M. Very far from it, Edward. I would by no means justify the crusaders; for their zeal, if a religious one, was by no means such as the religion of our Lord called for. It was, I fear, more a love of war and military glory than a sincere desire to spread the Gospel, or a real jealousy for their Saviour's honour. The conquests of the cross cannot be accomplished by the sword, unless it be, indeed, by the "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God," the preaching and teaching of the Gospel of Christ.

But to go on with our narrative. The Franks, as they were called, or Christians of the west, chose Godfrey of Boulogne, their general, to be king of Jerusalem; and there were nine Christian kings of Jerusalem, one after another, during a period of eighty eight years. At the end of this time, the Mussulmen again got possession of the sacred city; and they have continued their dominion there almost ever since, that is, for six hundred and fifty years. Not that the same Mahometan nations have been continually masters of it during that period. There were several changes, besides occasional invasions of conquering armies, which all helped to increase the miseries of Jerusalem, to add to the sufferings of the Jews, and to fulfil our Saviour's predictions.

E. And who are now the masters of Jerusalem?

M. The Turks at present possess it, calling themselves its protectors; for they consider it a holy place: but they are in reality its tyrants and oppressors.

E. There is then still a city of Jerusalem?

M. Yes, there is still a city, such as it is; but with

nothing to remind us of what it once was. A Turkish mosque continues to defile the spot where was once the temple of the Lord of Hosts! It is an elegant and stupendous building, but none but a Mussulman may enter it. The name that we adore, the name that is above every name, must not be mentioned there: indeed a few years ago it was a common practice with the Turks to spit in the face of every Christian whom they met in the streets. But notwithstanding the beauty of the building which adorns the hill of Moriah, the modern Jerusalem is altogether unlike the ancient city. "From the daughter of Zion all her beauty is departed." One of the many travellers who have visited it, tells us, that if a person were carried blindfold from England and placed in the centre of Jerusalem, or on any of the hills that surround it, nothing would exceed his astonishment on opening his eyes. From the mountains he would look down, not as one of old, upon a land flowing with milk and honey, but upon a wild, rugged, mountainous desert: no flocks feeding on the hills, no forests adorning the acclivities, no water flowing through the valleys; but one rude scene of melancholy waste, in the midst of which the once glorious Zion, as a woman forsaken, bows her head in widowed desolation.

E. But, Mamma, when he entered the city?

M. Ah! the magic of its name, and of all its early associations, would be still more lost there; and he would be more than ever disappointed then. No "streets of palaces and walks of state; no high raised arches of triumph; no fountains to cool the air, or porticos to exclude the sun—not a vestige to remind

him of its former military greatness, or the riches of its commerce ¹." No, all rude, mean, and melancholy, he is led to ask himself again and again, Can this be Zion? whom no man now careth for.

E. And are there any Jews there now?

M. There are a great many, and they have several synagogues, but small and mean. "For although," says a living traveller who visited Jerusalem in the year 1814, "the Jews are oppressed and treated with more contempt at Jerusalem than elsewhere, they still flock to it. To sleep in Abraham's bosom is the wish of the old; while the young visit it in hopes of the coming of the Messiah, and some are content to remain for the commerce they carry on. They pay a heavy tax to the Turkish governor, and the Jewish quarter, as in all eastern towns, is separate from the rest." Thus Jerusalem is still trodden down by Gentile feet, and has been so for nearly 1800 years. And all that time the Jewish nation have been a standing monument of the truth of Christ's predictions; themselves dispersed over the whole earth, and their land groaning still under the yoke of foreign lords and conquerors. So sure is the word of prophecy, so dreadful the wrath of God against those who reject His Christ.

E. But I hope the Jews will not always do this, Mamma.

M. We have reason to hope so, my child. The same sure word of prophecy seems plainly to encourage the delightful expectation that the Jews will one day be the chief among God's people, and Jerusalem again, perhaps, His most favoured city.

See *Luke* xxi. 23, 24.

¹ See Calmet.

FIFTY-FIRST SUNDAY EVENING.

THE FINAL JUDGMENT.

M. We spoke, last Sunday, of the vengeance executed upon the Jews, for their unbelieving rejection of the Son of God, as a solemn lesson to all mankind. But it is more: it is a type or figure of that more general, and far more dreadful judgment, which shall hereafter come upon all the rebellious, who live and die in unbelief and sin. Our Lord Himself connects the prophecy of His second Advent at the end of the world, with that awful exhibition of His power, the destruction of Jerusalem; when He came in power as Judge of the world, breaking in pieces, as with a rod of iron, those who would not have Him to reign over them. But this coming was invisible, except in its effects. These, indeed, were awfully both seen and felt, and are felt and seen to this very day.

E. I think you said before that Christ expressly told His disciples, not to expect to see Him in person at the destruction of Jerusalem.

M. Yes; He told them that many should then come in His name; and many false Christs did come, showing signs and wonders enough to deceive even the Christians, had they not been warned beforehand. Christ had said, "Believe them not." But our Lord's second Advent, when He shall come in person, will be very different. There will be no doubts then as to His appearance. He will not come in the desert, or the secret chamber, but in an overpowering and conspicuous manner, as the "lightning which cometh forth out of the east, but shineth even unto the west."

[*Second Series.*]

A a

His judgment too will then be extensive as the wickedness of men, descending like an eagle upon its prey: "So shall the coming of the Son of Man be. But of that day, and that hour knoweth no one; no, not the angels of heaven." Even the Lord Jesus in His human nature was ignorant of it. It is one of the secrets of the Almighty. We must not, therefore, expect to find out even from the Scriptures the exact *time* of its approach. All that our Lord has vouchsafed to tell us about it is, that we may expect great revolutions in the kingdoms of the world before that momentous period comes. These changes He has described to us in the hieroglyphical or figurative language of the east.

E. I thought so, Mamma: I thought, when Jesus spoke of the sun, and the moon, and the stars, being darkened and falling from heaven, that there must be some meaning in the words, which I did not understand. I have been reading the whole of the 24th of St. Matthew to myself since last Sunday, and trying to make it out; but that puzzled me.

M. I do not wonder at that: how should you discover that the language was entirely figurative—that the luminaries here spoken of were the sun, moon, and stars of the political world; the high powers that preside over its changes; the lights of our social firmament; rulers of its day and night; and signs of its varying seasons? But so they are; and all of them were to be darkened, and totter in their places, or to fall from their exalted sphere. And great have been the revolutions, which have already taken place among the nations of the earth, since "the tribulation of those days," when Jerusalem was given up to the Gentiles.

The imperial power of Rome then shone forth, (did it not?) as the sun of this lower world.

E. Yes, it did indeed; but it has been darkened, Mamma, and its light is gone.

M. And how many inferior powers have shared the same fate, and fallen from their high estate! But I shall not dwell much upon this part of the prophecy; because a great deal of it is still unaccomplished, and therefore still mysterious. Prophecies can only be understood aright when they are fulfilled. They then become matters of history; subjects of most improving study. We will now turn our thoughts rather to that great event, of which the destruction of Jerusalem was only a forewarning; only a type or figure. I mean the time when the Lord Jesus will come in His own person, as Judge of the world, to deliver the righteous and to punish the wicked, in a far more remarkable manner than that in which the unbelieving Jews were then punished, and the humble, confiding Christians saved from the surrounding destruction.

This is the great subject to which the destruction of Jerusalem should lead our thoughts. We should keep in mind, that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to day, and for ever;" the same awful Judge to the impenitent; the same blessed Saviour to them that humbly trust in Him. When we read of Jerusalem, we should think of that day, when "the Son of Man shall come in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory, and shall send His angels, with a great sound of a trumpet, to gather together His elect from the uttermost parts of the earth." And if we believe that He will thus "come to be our Judge," we should never cease to pray that we may "be numbered with

His saints in glory everlasting." It was to this great period, this solemn close of things, that the disciples were to look on through all their troubles; troubles at the time, no doubt, very grievous, and full of trial, but from which they were to gather encouragement and to lift up their heads: you can tell me why, I am sure.

E. I suppose, because these things were only the signs of their own redemption, as St. Luke says, you know, xxi. 28. But how was it said that their redemption was "drawing nigh?" Have not eighteen hundred years passed away already since the destruction of Jerusalem?

M. They have, Edward; and it may be many years yet, perhaps hundreds, perhaps thousands, before the end of the world. But these words were the words of Him, who sees things as they really are, and not as they appear to us. You must remember that, in the sight of the Lord, "one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." Compared with eternity they are as a nothing! "As a drop of water is the sea, and a gravel-stone in comparison of the sand, so are a thousand years to the days of eternity¹." "Our life is but a span long." There are, it is said, insects which are born when the sun rises, and grow old before it sets, And what is our life when viewed from on high, as our Saviour viewed it, but a day, an hour, a moment: "so soon passeth it away, and we are gone!" In this sense we might well understand our Saviour's words, when He told His disciples, that even then their redemption was drawing nigh. But to draw nigh or approach does not neces-

¹ Eccles. xviii. 10.

sarily mean that an event is near, but only that it is coming,—that things are in a train for its arrival: that its march is as it were begun; and that it is already on its way; though to our apprehensions its course may be a long one, extending over many centuries. It is thus, you know, that we speak in regard to the beautiful works of nature when they first show themselves in the spring of the year.

E. I think I know what you mean. When we see the first green bud bursting through the bark of the tree, we begin to say that summer is coming, although months will pass before the tree is in full leaf, and the fruit ripe.

M. Yes; for the bud is an earnest of the autumn; the first blade of corn is a pledge or promise of the coming harvest; and so the great harvest of the world is said to be drawing nigh, because the seed has not only been sown, but is already springing up: the Gospel has been preached and its growth is already manifest: although the time is not yet come for the angelic reapers to come forth to gather the tares, and to bind them in bundles to burn them; and then to gather the wheat into the heavenly garner. Thus too when the disciples saw the first manifestations of our Lord's power in the destruction of Jerusalem and in the spread of his religion, they perceived that His kingdom was begun, and that events were now in a course for its coming at last in glory. The winter of Pagan darkness and Jewish superstition was at an end. Spring was beginning in the moral world: the Gospel, already preached to Jew and Gentile, was putting forth its tender branches and "its leaves for the healing of the nations"

had begun to appear. And though the time of fruit was not yet, yet from these signs they might rest assured that it was coming, was drawing nigh; as surely as the autumn succeeds to the spring. Therefore, though men in general may count the Advent of Christ slack in its approach, and though to them it may appear to tarry, yet the believing Christian will wait for it, and expect it continually, because he knows that it will surely come in God's appointed time, and "will not tarry." Its coming is begun already, and nothing can stop it in its progress: the redemption of the Christian "draweth nigh."

E. But, Mamma, I suppose there are great numbers of us who will never live to see the coming of Christ?

M. Most likely, my child; yet to each one of us separately Christ may be said to come at the hour of death; for after that there will be no more change until the day of judgment. As the tree then falls, so it must lie: yet how few seriously believe this! How few at least live as if they believed it! Like the people who lived before the flood, in the days of Noah, they despise all that is said of the coming of the Lord, and live as if death and judgment were idle sounds, without any real meaning. The business and pleasures of life, and too often its sins, occupy them entirely; and so, alas! it will be to the very last. That day will take many by surprise. It "will come when they look not for it."

E. But some will believe and watch?

M. Yes; and "blessed are those servants whom our Lord when he cometh shall find so doing." Happy the Christian who is always living for eternity; always looking to the Advent of his Saviour; always

preparing for His coming, whether it be in an affliction, or in death, or in judgment; like the faithful steward in the parable, ever at his post; like the wise virgins, having his lamp, the lamp of piety, always supplied with oil; like the good and faithful servant, when entrusted with their master's property, continually improving his talents.

How will such Christians love the appearing of their great God and Saviour Jesus Christ! How welcome to them will be that hour, when "the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with all his holy angels with him, and sit upon the throne of his glory, and before him shall be gathered all nations:" awful and overpowering sight; yet, to the good and faithful, a joyful one too; full of encouragement, full of triumph.

E. But, Mamma, I should have thought that the very best men that ever lived would have been rather afraid of the coming of Christ to judgment, when they think of all their sins?

M. If they had reason to think that they would be dealt with after their own deservings, they would indeed have cause to tremble. But we know that the Bible speaks of sins being "blotted out" and "done away;" and tells us of persons who "have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Such persons may look forward with joy to the coming of that Saviour, whose blood has redeemed them from the guilt, and the power, and the punishment of sin; and whose Spirit has been continually renewing their hearts and lives; making them every day more "meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." We can imagine such persons,

dear Edward, looking forward with humble joy and confidence to the appearing of that Saviour, whom they have loved and trusted in upon earth. He will not frown upon such servants: No, He will say unto them instead, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

E. But how kind of our Lord, Mamma, to call any servant "good!"

M. What you say is very true. It is of the Lord's mercy that He calls any one good; for there is none really good but God. Yet in a certain sense the Scripture continually applies this word to human beings, and makes a marked distinction, which we must never attempt to blot out, between the good and the evil, the righteous and the wicked. It is a dreadful thing "to call evil good, or good evil." The Scripture humbles all men to the very dust, but does not speak of all alike. None are absolutely good; none perfectly so; none naturally, or of themselves good: yet by repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and obedience to His will, men may become good in a general sense, so as at the last to receive, though they cannot *deserve*, from the Lord Himself that gracious sentence, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" For though it is faith that saves us, it is faith working by love. The way it saves us, is by making us holy and good and faithful. Therefore it is that we are so often told in Scripture, that men will be judged hereafter according to their works. Faith must then be shewn by its blessed fruits.

E. Then, Mamma, I should almost be afraid that the Pharisee would be best off at the day of judgment, and that the poor Publican would be despised.

M. My dear boy, the error of the Pharisees did not consist in being “zealous of good works;” for that is the great mark of Christ’s peculiar people, who love His appearing, and look to it continually. Far different, you know, was the Pharisee: his works were really evil, under an outward appearance of holiness: we have lately had a long list of their works, which were all evil; and yet miserable as they were, we know how they prided themselves in them. But when Christ shall return to judge the world, though He will graciously reward His faithful servants, and remember their services done out of love and gratitude to Him. —

E. I suppose you mean in visiting the sick, comforting the prisoner, clothing the naked, and feeding the hungry, like the righteous, Mamma, in that beautiful passage, which ends the 25th of Matthew.

M. I do, my child; but though the Lord Jesus will remember all these things, and consider them just as if they had been done to Himself; yet so far will the faithful servants be from priding themselves upon them, that they will have forgotten them, as our Lord teaches us, altogether; thinking them utterly unworthy of their Lord’s acceptance; as at the most, few; at the best, imperfect. So that when the King shall say unto them, “I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me; then shall the righteous answer Him, saying, Lord, *when* saw we thee an hungred and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed

thee ?” They have forgotten their works ; but Jesus remembers them. “ Not unto us,” is the language of their hearts ; “ not unto us, but unto thy name be the praise : for thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred and tongue, and people and nation.” Blessed company ! Who would not be there ? How different were they from those who never fed the hungry, nor clothed the naked, nor visited the sick, nor comforted the prisoner, but thought of nothing but their own pleasures and interests ; giving no proofs of their faith or their love !

Oh ! how different ! “ These shall go away into everlasting punishment ; but the righteous into life eternal.” Who would not try to lead the life of the righteous, that his last end may be like his ? to be remembered by the merciful Saviour in the great day, when of His own free goodness He will so gloriously reward the labours of love done to the least of His distressed followers in His name. For the poor and the miserable are deputed, as it were, by Him to receive at our hands these tokens of our gratitude to the Son of God ; these proofs that we are trying, through faith in His name, to imitate His heavenly example.

We have now considered, though very briefly, the whole of the 25th chapter of St. Matthew ; and it has given us some important and interesting subjects of conversation. Next Sunday we shall return to our blessed Lord’s own history, and follow Him in some of the solemn scenes which closed His Ministry on earth.

See *Matt.* xxiv. 23—xxv. 46. *Mark* xiii. 21—37.

Luke xxi. 25—36.

FIFTY-SECOND SUNDAY EVENING.

THE LAST SUPPER.

E. Dear Mamma, your account of our Lord's prophecies interested me very much ; but I am very anxious to hear what our Saviour did after He left the temple.

M. Our blessed Lord had come up to Jerusalem to keep the passover. Being born under the law of Moses, He walked in all the statutes and ordinances of the law blameless. On this ground alone our Lord would have kept the passover : but there was something in that sacred feast, which made Him particularly desirous now to partake of it with His disciples. Perhaps you can tell me what the Old Testament tells us about the passover, and why it was so called.

E. I recollect that this feast was appointed in remembrance of the night, in which the angel of the Lord 'passed over' the houses of the Israelites, when He slew the Egyptians : those Israelites, I mean, whose doors were sprinkled with the blood of the lamb.

M. And I need not remind you that that lamb was a type or figure of "The Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world : " whose precious blood was shed to save us from everlasting destruction. St. John the Baptist had spoken thus of Christ when He first began to preach on the banks of the river Jordan ; and now His prophetic words were about to be accomplished. The true passover was about to be slain ; and the Son of Man was to be "brought as a lamb to the slaughter." The type was to give way to the reality—the shadow to the substance ; and it is a wonderful circumstance,

Edward, that our Saviour should have been taken from the celebration of the one to the accomplishment of the other; that the offering up of himself, once for all, as the *true Paschal Lamb*, should have been made at the very time, when the law directed the typical Lamb to be slain! Surely this fact points out Christ Jesus to us as the *great sacrifice* for sin. It is wonderful too to think that, in the whole of this awful transaction, the persecutors of Christ, the Chief Priests and Scribes who plotted His death, the disciple who betrayed Him, the multitude who called for His execution, seemed only to be following, and indeed did follow, the free bent of their own corrupt inclinations. So mysterious are the ways of Providence! So deep and unsearchable the wisdom and knowledge of God; who overrules, to His own great and glorious purposes, all the wickedness and waywardness even of those very men, who are the most bent against His will!

E. I suppose then that the malice of the Jews, with the violence of the people, and even the covetousness of Judas, which you have often told me of, were all helping in reality to bring about the prophecy?

M. Yes; all hastening on the redemption of a lost world by the blood of Christ. Yet nothing could be further from their own thoughts. The object of each was simply to carry some private purpose of their own. You know how long the Pharisees had been observing Him with envy; how long they had sought even to destroy Him: and now we find them assembled together solemnly to consider how best to accomplish their wicked purpose. It was then that Judas Iscariot came and offered, if they would give him money, to betray His Master to them at some favourable moment, when

He should be alone with His disciples, so that there could be no disturbance or resistance of the people.

E. How dreadful to think, that Judas must at last have been staying with our blessed Lord, merely for the sake of giving Him up to those fierce bad men ! But go on, Mamma.

M. The end of our Lord's labours of love was thus approaching near ; that awful end ! The day of unleavened bread was coming when the passover must be killed. It was now Thursday in Passion week ; and on the day following the Paschal lamb must be offered up. But besides the killing of the lamb, which was done publicly by the priest, there were other observances customary on this occasion among the Jews. As the religious day began, with them, from the sunset of the evening before, they considered *that* the beginning of the sacred feast ; so that, although the passover was not to be killed until the Friday, the sacred day began from sunset on Thursday : and the Jews, especially those who could not come up to Jerusalem, used to keep a feast or supper in remembrance of the passover, but without the *sacrifice*. They did eat the passover, though they did not kill the Paschal lamb ; for that sacrifice could not take place before the appointed time. Now it was in this way that our Lord kept the passover with His disciples. He partook of the *commemorative* supper with which the feast began. His time was at hand, the time of the great sacrifice ; and as this was to be the very time when the passover must be killed, it was impossible that our Lord could observe the latter.

E. No, He could not do it ; for He was to fulfil that in His own person, Mamma.

M. Just so ; and therefore to keep the feast of unleavened bread at all, it was necessary there should be no delay. Accordingly Jesus sends His disciples to make ready for Himself and them ; having providentially arranged beforehand that they should find a room furnished for the purpose, and its owner ready to receive them ; as you may see in Luke xxii. 10—13. And when the evening was come, the evening of Thursday in Passion week, the Paschal eve on which the feast began, our Lord sat down, and His twelve Apostles with Him.

It is impossible to imagine a more solemn occasion. Observe the affecting words in which our Lord addresses His disciples : “ With desire have I desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer : for I say unto you, I will not any more eat of it, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God.”

The shadow, you see, was passing fast away ; its substance was coming. “ Christ our passover ” was about to be “ sacrificed for us ; ” not for the Jews only, but for the whole world : and He was Himself keeping for the last time that feast which was of no use but to typify Himself ; to point out the Christ. You can tell me perhaps how long the passover had been observed.

E. The Exodus or departure of the children of Israel out of Egypt took place in the year 1487 B. C. : so, Mamma, the passover must have been kept for more than 1500 years.

M. Yes, for fifteen centuries or more (as some reckon) the Jews, by the command of God, had thus kept up the remembrance of their redemption out of Egypt, and of that blood of sprinkling, by which they

were then saved. But a greater redemption was now to be purchased, even of a whole world from the bondage of sin, to be purchased too with blood, “with blood divine,” the blood of the Lamb of God. The mysterious meaning of the Paschal feast was now at length about to be unfolded; its prophetic figures, so important to all mankind, were on the very eve of their fulfilment; for the day had come on which the *true passover* was to be offered up.

E. Was it not now, Mamma, that our Lord instituted what we call the Lord’s supper?

M. Yes, my child; it was on this solemn occasion, that the Lord Jesus instituted that holy feast, which we call the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper; in which you are so excellently instructed at the close of our Church Catechism. The Jewish Church was kept continually in expectation, by the Paschal feast, of the redemption which their prophets predicted. But it was necessary that the great sacrifice should be *remembered*, as well as *foretold*: for this cause our Lord instituted this other feast, which His Church was to keep for ever, in remembrance of Him; to show forth her faith in His death, and her grateful recollection of the blessings purchased for her by it. It was to be kept, not for fifteen centuries only, but as long as the Church should remain in the world;—until our Lord’s coming again.

Remember then that the Lord’s supper is to us what the Paschal supper was to the Jews; only theirs was partly a prophetic feast, pointing out what was to come; ours commemorates what has already been accomplished. Remember too how sacred, and how solemn an institution that must be, which was intended

to fill up in the Christian Church the same place which the Passover did in the Jewish; and which was meant to be “a perpetual memory of our Lord’s death until his coming again.” There is a beautiful account given us in the Gospels, of the manner in which our Lord instituted this supper.

E. Is there, dear Mamma; pray read it to me.

M. We are told that whilst “they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave to his disciples, and said, Take eat; this is my body, which is given for you; this do in remembrance of me.” Not that the bread was changed so as to *become* in very deed, the body of our Lord; but that it was consecrated to *represent* that body;—to put that body broken for us before our souls, as their spiritual food and sustenance, just as bread is the natural support of our bodies. The expression is, what we call a figurative one, which I think you understand now perfectly well; such expressions being, as you know, very common in scripture.

E. Is not the Passover just such an expression Mamma; for when we say the Passover was killed, we mean the Paschal lamb—do we not?

M. Yes;—which was killed to commemorate the Passover, and was not itself the passing over. Or when our Lord Himself is called the Lamb of God, the Bread of life, the Door, the Shepherd, the Vine, —we know that our Lord is *compared* to these things, and that they are put to represent His different offices or character, and we never puzzle ourselves on the subject, nor imagine for a moment, that He was really a lamb, a door, or a vine. Similar is the language respecting the Lord’s Supper: the bread there used

is figuratively the body of Christ ; it is an emblem of that bread of life, a memorial of the offering up of His body for the life of the world ; and so, when rightly received, it is the communion of the body of Christ.

E. I think I understand this : but there is wine used in the Lord's supper, is there not, as well as bread ?

M. Yes ; because " after supper the Lord Jesus took a cup of wine, and gave it to His disciples saying, ' Drink ye all of it ; for this is my blood of the New Testament which is shed for many for the remission of sins.' " Here the blood of Christ, shed upon the cross for sinners, is represented by the cup, or wine ; just as His crucified body was by the bread ; and both are to be equally received by His redeemed people in grateful remembrance of His death.

You see then, dear Edward, when it was, and why it was, that our blessed Lord instituted that holy sacrament. You see that " to the end that we should always remember the exceeding great love of our Master and only Saviour Jesus Christ, in humbling himself, even to the death of the cross, for us miserable sinners, who lay in darkness and the shadow of death, He hath instituted and ordained holy mysteries as pledges of His love, and for a continual remembrance of His death, to our great and endless comfort." May we ever go to that holy table which Christ spreads for us, truly and earnestly repenting us of those sins which nailed Him to the accursed tree, with a lively faith in that mercy which is there set forth ; and with hearts overflowing with love to God, and love to our fellow creatures ! and may " so eat the flesh of His dear Son and drink His blood, that our sinful bodies

may be made clean by His body, and our souls washed in His most precious blood; and that we may evermore dwell in Him and He in us."

E. Then, Mamma, all Christians ought to partake of the holy communion; and I too shall go with you some day to the Lord's table?

M. Indeed I trust you will, as soon as you have been solemnly admitted by confirmation into the number of established believers in Christ. It is the excellent rule of our Church, that young persons should become regular communicants, humble and devout attendants at the Lord's table, as soon as they are old enough seriously to feel the importance of those vows, which were made for them in their baptism; and have taken them publicly upon them in the Church, while they received from the Bishop's hands an assurance of God's grace and goodness towards them. But, alas! the rules of the Church are too often despised; her voice is disregarded; and too many young Christians grow up unmindful of their spiritual blessings, and, like Esau, despising their birth-right. Even those too, who are by the care of their parents taken to be confirmed, are often far from making their confirmation what it ought to be—a solemn renewal of their Christian profession—a willing, a decided taking upon them the yoke of their Saviour; that gentle, gracious yoke to which He so lovingly invites them to submit.

E. Then, when I am confirmed, I may come to the Lord's table?

M. I hope so indeed, my child: it would be a sad thing if you were to live, as too many do, without thinking of that affectionate command, "Do this in

remembrance of me.” Only you must remember, that those who come to this heavenly feast, must come in the wedding garment; they must come in penitence, and faith, and charity; in a spirit of deep thankfulness, and in all those tempers and dispositions of mind, so beautifully described in the Church Catechism, and in the communion service. There is danger in neglecting this holy ordinance—there is the utmost danger in profaning it, in coming to it carelessly and irreverently ! But so is the benefit great, unspeakably great, if we keep the feast with humility and reverence, with faith and thanksgiving; as a memorial of Christ’s death, and a solemn means of communion with Him.

See *Matt.* xxvi. 1—5, 14—20, 26—29. *Mark* xiv. 1, 2, 10—17, 23—25. *Luke* xxii. 1—20.



FIFTY-THIRD SUNDAY EVENING.

THE SUPPER CHAMBER. THE GARDEN OF
GETHSEMANE.

M. We have already spoken of the last supper of which our Lord partook with His disciples, when He instituted that blessed ordinance, in which we keep up a perpetual memory of His death until His coming again. But besides the institution of that holy Sacrament, many interesting particulars are recorded of that solemn evening. It was then that our Saviour gave His disciples that affecting “example of lowliest humility,” at which you have often wondered.

E. You mean when He washed their feet.

M. Yes ; the Son of God, most high and holy, did Himself wash the feet of His poor, frail disciples ; thereby teaching them to hesitate at no act of condescension to each other. Well might the disciples be astonished to see their Lord and Master approaching them to perform so mean and servile an office. Well might the affectionate Peter at the first impulse exclaim, " Lord, dost thou wash my feet ? " Well might he even start back and say, " Thou shalt never wash my feet. " We cannot be surprised that he should be amazed at such wonderful humility, for he was ignorant of our Lord's meaning in it. " What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know after : " such was the gentle reply of the Redeemer, when His disciples would have resisted His gracious intentions ; and when even that was not enough to overcome the scruples of Peter, He condescended graciously to explain to him the meaning of what He had done, saying, " If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me ; " thus intimating that this washing meant, or typified, something more than appeared, even the washing of the soul from sin, which we all require at the hands of Christ, and without which we cannot share in His salvation. Simon Peter, when he heard this, no longer resisted, but said, " Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. " The holiest men are generally the most sensible of their sins, and the most anxious to be thoroughly purified from them by Christ their Saviour.

E. What did our Lord say to that, Mamma ?

M. " He that is washed needeth not, save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit. " To understand

this, we must call to mind that it was the custom in eastern countries to wear no shoes on the feet, but sandals covering but a small part of them. The consequence was, that the feet required continual washing, although the rest of the person was clean. In like manner the servants of God, even the chief among them, though already washed from their sins in the blood of Christ, yet soil, as it were, their feet in walking through this sinful world; and stand in need of daily washing by continual application to their Saviour's mercy. Not indeed wilful sin; but some error or frailty is ever requiring forgiveness.

E. You said that our Lord intended to set His disciples an example of humility and kindness: did He tell them so, as plainly as He told them that the water was to show them how much they needed pardon?

M. He did not leave either them or us in doubt about this matter: for "after he had washed their feet and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done unto you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master have washed your feet, ye ought also to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an *example* that ye should do as I have done unto you."

It was in the supper chamber too that the Saviour plainly foretold how Judas Iscariot should betray Him, and how Peter, even Peter, who loved his Lord so ardently, should thrice deny Him.

E. Ah, who would have thought that Peter would have acted thus?

M. None; but least of all himself. He had yet

to learn how weak and frail a being he was ; to learn it by painful experience. That he had no idea at this moment that it would be possible for him to forsake his Master, is very clear ; for when Jesus told them all that He was now going to leave them, and that they could not follow Him at present, Peter said unto Him, " Lord, why cannot I follow thee now ? I will lay down my life for thy sake." But Jesus knew His poor disciple better than he knew himself, when He answered him, " Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake ? Verily, verily I say unto thee, the cock shall not crow till thou hast denied me thrice."

A sad forewarning indeed ! and had Peter laid it seriously to heart, it might have saved him from much shame and sorrow. Had it led him humbly to search his own heart, he might, perhaps, have detected the weakness that lurked there, and have been led to throw himself upon the mighty for strength, and to cry out once more, " Lord, save me, I perish."

E. Oh ! that he had done so ; for I am sure Jesus would have stretched out His hand to him again ; but go on, dear Mamma.

M. You see there was much sorrowful discourse at this last supper ; but there was much comfort too. The Lord Jesus could not bear to make His disciples sad ; and therefore, although He was obliged to tell them these painful things, He entreated them at the same time to be comforted, and poured the balm of His own healing words into their hearts. It was necessary, indeed, now to prepare them for His departure, for in a very few hours more He would have left them ; but to the very utmost He would console them under this sad separation. " Let not your

hearts be troubled: ye believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you." Here was comfort indeed. Amidst all the trials, and sorrows, and persecutions, which they would soon have to bear alone, they might remember these cheering words, and call to mind that Jesus their Master was gone back to His Father's house in heaven, to prepare a place in that blissful home for His beloved attendants upon earth. For a little while, indeed, they would "weep and lament;" and their hearts should be very sorrowful; but Jesus would "see them again," and their "sorrow should be turned into joy;" and their hearts would rejoice for ever in Him with a joy that no man should take away. In all their troubles they must send up their thoughts to their Father's house above, and to the happy abodes prepared for their reception there.

"Oh! many are the mansions there :
But not in one hath grief a share."

But there were some blessings promised them then, of which they should begin to partake whilst still pilgrims upon earth. When their Lord should be taken away from them, He would not leave them alone and comfortless, He promised to send them "another comforter who should abide with them for ever," even the Holy Spirit of truth, who should dwell continually within them, to guide and strengthen them in their great work, to cheer and support their drooping hearts, and by His purifying and sanctifying grace to prepare them more and more to join their Saviour again.

E. But would the Holy Spirit make amends for Christ's absence?

M. I may safely answer, "Yes;" for did not the Lord Jesus intend that this divine Comforter should make up to them for the loss of His visible presence? There are many ways in which He would do this. The value, indeed, of this inestimable gift, the gift of the Holy Ghost, is taught us nowhere so strongly as by our Lord on this occasion. What a blessing it is still, even to us, though not inspired like the Apostles, we shall, perhaps, never fully understand in this world; for by reason of the perverseness of our natures, we are continually more or less resisting His blessed influences, and we never allow Him to do all that He would do for us: but what the Holy Spirit was intended to be to us, and still more to the Apostles, we see plainly when we find our Saviour encouraging His disciples under His own departure, because, in consequence of that, the Comforter would come to them.

Thus did the Lord Jesus strengthen the hearts of His disciples, He promised them the Holy Ghost; He talked to them of mansions in the heavens; He bequeathed to them a legacy of peace; "My peace," He said, "I give unto you;" He exhorted them to abide in Him as branches in the parent vine, that they might bring forth fruit unto everlasting life, He assured them of the Father's love to them, and promised that, whatever they should ask the Father in His name, He would give it them. And, to crown the whole, Jesus lifted up His eyes to heaven and prayed for them; prayed to God to keep them safe through this evil world, and to make them one, even as He and the Father are one; prayed that He would sanctify them by His word, and bring them

to His eternal kingdom. Happy disciples, to be the subjects of such a prayer ! And happy may we be too : for not only for that little assembly did Christ pray, but (praised be His grace !) for all those also who should believe on Him, through their word ; for all true believers ; the living members of His Church in every age ; that all might be united in the same privileges on earth, in the same glory in heaven.

What a subject for our thoughts, our hopes, our supplications does this sublime prayer afford us ! What a precious portion of God's word ! How dear to every Christian ! How cheering to each one of us should it be amidst our daily conflicts and troubles, to think that Jesus prayed for us also to the eternal Father, and committed us to His keeping and love ; that we might not perish, but have everlasting life ! What an encouragement to pray for ourselves !

You will find our Saviour's last conversation with His disciples and His affecting prayer, on both of which I have only been able now to touch very briefly, recorded in St. John's Gospel from the xivth to the xviiiith chapters.

You see how important every moment was that passed in that supper chamber ; and how much was crowded into those few short hours, of deep and solemn interest to the whole world.

How thankful should we be that we are thus admitted, as it were, into the sacred retirement of the Redeemer, to listen to what passed there, and even to partake in the blessings there distributed ! Well may we long to linger in that spot of holiest memory ; feeling that it is indeed "good to be here : " but the sacred moments rolled by ; and a time so precious to the

disciples and to us, passed away; and the hour came when even they, however reluctantly, must leave the supper chamber: and we must now follow them, where they followed their Lord and our Lord. We are told that, "when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives, unto a place called Gethsemane; where was a garden, into which He entered with His disciples." Moses was told, as he approached the burning bush, to put off his shoes from off his feet, because the place where He stood was holy ground. And is not this holy ground? the garden of Gethsemane, the spot where that mysterious agony occurred, in which our Lord's prospect of suffering was so appalling as to lead Him to pray, that, if it were possible, He might be spared the approaching trial, and the bitter cup might pass from Him. Shall we not approach it with reverence and awe; and put away, as we draw near, every worldly or unquiet thought?

The Garden of Gethsemane was at the foot of Mount Olivet;

"Low, and proper to be made
The Redeemer's lone retreat."

It had apparently been often consecrated before by the presence of the Son of God, who, when He wished to retire from the noise and interruptions of the world, would retire to this sweet and quiet spot. For St. John tells us, that "Jesus oftentimes resorted thither with His disciples."

E. How they must have loved that garden, Mamma!

M. I have no doubt they did: for there they must oftentimes have held holiest communion with Christ their Saviour: there no doubt their hearts had often been

warmed with the heavenly truths He taught: there they had, perhaps, frequently joined with their Redeemer in prayer.

But whatever had been their associations with this spot hitherto, they would be nothing to the remembrance that would henceforth belong to it. Jesus no doubt had known all along, that this garden was to be the scene of that dreadful conflict which He was to go through before He died: who can say that this was not the very reason why from love to us He chose to go there? who can say that He had not visited that spot so often, to accustom His mind to the awful scene that was to take place there? Yet when the dreadful night came, His human nature for a moment shrank from it. He was about to bear our griefs, to carry our sorrows, the sorrows and griefs of a whole world! to be wounded for our transgressions, to be bruised for our iniquities, the iniquities and transgressions of all the human race! Great, inconceivably great, would be the sufferings that should atone for such accumulated guilt. No wonder that even the Son of God shrank from them; especially as He was Himself "holy, harmless, undefiled," free from all spot of sin, and therefore unmeet for suffering. Appalling was His agony; there did He pray in His distress with strong crying and tears to God; "and his sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood falling down to the ground." Can we wonder that, "wrung with anguish andwhelmed with blood," He should cry, "My soul is vexed and sorrowful even unto death;" and again, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me?" especially when we recollect that He was *man*, as well as God, and that to our human nature sorrow is at all

times a very bitter and distasteful cup. But though fully sensible of its bitterness, the Holy Jesus drank it with the most entire resignation to the divine will, adding to His prayer for deliverance those submissive words, "Nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt."

Such was the agony in the garden of Gethsemane. Yet none on earth observed: none of those whose sins had caused this agony. His very disciples slept: the favourite three, Peter, James, and John, took no notice of their Master's grief. Heaven only sympathised; "there appeared an angel unto him from heaven strengthening him." Surely if we would see sin in its true colours, we have only to look at our Saviour prostrate in Gethsemane under its awful weight! If ever you are tempted to think lightly of sin, let me beseech you to call to mind this dreadful night!

E. But how could the disciples sleep at such a time?

M. It was wonderful, indeed, that they could, and shows how weak our nature is. Our Lord had withdrawn from them at their first entrance into the garden, telling them to remain and watch: but they could not watch even one hour. When He returned, He found them "sleeping for sorrow" and weariness of body. So little are human beings, even at the best, to be depended upon in the time of trouble: so apt are they, by reason of the frailty of the flesh, to fail us, when we most need their help: so that, if God were not ever at hand to strengthen us, we should often sink under our sorrows.

E. Was Jesus much displeased with His disciples?

M. Observe His gentle reproof, “What ! could ye not watch with me one hour?” such an hour too as this ! “the spirit, indeed, is willing, but the flesh is weak.” So graciously did He make allowance for their infirmity, and give them credit for real affection to Him, instead of reproaching them for deserting Him at so trying a time.

But we must continue the melancholy narrative, so distressing to us to read, but so necessary for us to know. The hour was now come, the hour of darkness, to which our Lord had so often alluded; and whilst He was gently remonstrating with His disciples, the traitor Judas came, and “with him a great multitude, with swords, and with staves, from the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders:” for Judas knew this sacred spot, having often been among the little company with whom Jesus had been accustomed to resort there; thus turning, as indeed the Psalmist had foretold, the very friendship of his Saviour against Him ! Yet even in this moment of apparent weakness and destitution, the greatness of Christ was displayed: for when the band approached, He advanced calmly to meet them, and declared that He was that Jesus of Nazareth whom they sought. Unable to bear His holy eye, “they went backward and fell to the ground:” so easy was it for Christ to overcome His enemies, by His own personal majesty, or else to have called to His service innumerable angels to defend Him.

E. But then the prophecies would not have been fulfilled, Mamma ?

M. No ; neither would men have been redeemed. Jesus, therefore, suffered Himself to be betrayed by Judas, even with a treacherous kiss, into the hands of

His enemies, not attempting to save Himself, but begging only for the safety of His disciples ; saying to the rude people who seized Him, " If, therefore, ye seek me, let these go their way." You see what care He takes of His people, when He could not forget them, even in such a moment as this. And that mighty power, which might now have been exerted to astonish and confound His enemies, was simply employed to remedy the evils which the violence of His disciples had inflicted.

E. Their violence, Mamma?

M. Yes; Peter, in the warmth of his zeal for his Master, drew his sword, and struck one of the servants of the high priest, and cut off his ear. But Jesus said unto him, " Put up thy sword in its place ; for all they that take the sword, shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou not that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how shall the Scripture be fulfilled that thus it must be? And he touched the servant's ear and healed him."

So bright in the midst of this dark scene was our Saviour's charity ! But the mercy that dwelt in His breast, was more than men—was more than angels could feel. Nevertheless He remonstrated with His enemies, for coming thus with swords and staves to take Him in the night, as if He had been a thief, instead of coming openly to Him when He taught daily and publicly in the temple. But the Scripture had foretold, that He should " be numbered with the transgressors," and in this manner, partly they were fulfilled. He was seized by His persecutors as a criminal; and even by His disciples He was now abandoned; and

left to “tread the wine press” of His affliction “alone. Of the people there was none with Him;” not even one of those who had hitherto been the favoured attendants upon His sacred person. The courageous Peter was gone: the beloved, the affectionate John had deserted his Master. A few hours ago He was leaning His head “on Jesus’ breast” at supper: but now, with all the rest, he “forsook Him and fled.”

Here, though unwillingly, we must pause for to night, and leave the rest of this melancholy history for another evening.

See *John* xiii. 1—xviii. 11. *Matt.* xxvi. 21—25, 30—56.

Mark xiv. 18—21, 26—52. *Luke* xxii. 21—53.

FIFTY-FOURTH SUNDAY EVENING.

CHRIST CONDEMNED BY THE JEWISH COUNCIL.

M. From the garden of Gethsemane our blessed Lord was led bound like a criminal to Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas the high priest, that Caiaphas who had formerly advised the Jews that it was expedient that one man should die for the people. But Annas, however active a part he might have taken in this awful transaction, was not at the time in chief authority; therefore he sent Jesus, still bound, to the house or court of the high priest, where all the chief priests and scribes had assembled together for the express purpose of sitting in judgment upon Jesus.

E. How dreadful it is, Mamma, to think of Jesus being led about *bound* as if He had been a thief or a murderer!

M. Yes, those sacred hands ! to see them wrung and bruised with those merciless cords, is enough to make our eyes run down with tears.

E. And even when they had brought Him before Caiaphas, I do not see what they could find to accuse Him of. Our Lord had never done any thing wrong, but had spent His whole time in doing good, and teaching the people what was right.

M. Certainly He had : and it was, in reality, that very goodness of our Lord, that stirred up the malice of His enemies to seek His death. They could not bear His faithful admonitions and rebukes : they were put continually to shame by His holy example ; they were filled with jealousy at His very miracles ; for they were afraid, that He would in this way draw the people after Him away from themselves, who had hitherto been, unchecked, "the blind leaders of the blind." Then too they were afraid, lest their masters the Romans should take alarm at the appearance of so extraordinary a person among them, and come with an army upon them ; little thinking, alas ! that the very way to bring upon themselves the armies of Rome, as we remarked before, was this, which they were now pursuing—the rejection of their Messiah. But, though worldly fear, and still more bitter malice, were the real causes of the conduct of the chief Priests and Scribes, it was necessary that they should appear to act with justice, and have some seeming ground for condemning our Lord. Accordingly, they sought out for false witnesses against Jesus, but found none to suit their purpose. Many, indeed, came forward ; but their testimony did not agree ; they contradicted each other. At length, two false witnesses came and

said, "We have heard him say, I will destroy this temple made with hands, and within three days I will build another, made without hands," an offence highly atrocious in the eyes of a Jew; with whom a word against the temple was little less than blasphemy.

E. What a shame it was to misconstrue our Lord's words in that way, Mamma! Jesus was speaking of His own body when He talked of destroying the temple and building it again.

M. Yes; for "in Him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily;" and His words were evidently figurative. But even here their witness did not agree; it was not sufficient and did not come up to the point. The high priest himself was obliged to acknowledge that the charge was a very vague one. Thus no testimony could be found against Him. There had been so much goodness and wisdom in all that Jesus both did and said, that none were able to convict Him of sin, nor to bear witness of any evil either in His words or in His works. "Oh, Saviour, what a perfect innocence was in thy life, what an exact purity in thy doctrine, when malice itself cannot contrive how to slander thee!" Well might the prophet say, "He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter," as a lamb without spot or blemish, as the Lamb of God. "Yet as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth." He answered not a word to the false charges which they brought against Him. At length the high priest, exercising the authority belonging to his office, answered and said unto Him: "I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be Christ, the Son of God." To such an appeal our Lord could not refuse to reply, without treating the authority of the high priest

with contempt; and this He would not do, because that power, however abused, was given him from above. "Besides there is a time to speak and a time to keep silent, and Christ has given us a pattern of both." Indeed the question itself was put in the name of the living God, and Jesus was called upon by the authority of the high priest in answering it to speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. He therefore said, "I am; and hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven."

E. Mamma, I think when the high priest heard that, he must have hesitated.

M. So bent were they all upon their wicked work, that even this reply had no effect upon any of them. The high priest no sooner heard it, than "he rent his clothes and said, He hath spoken blasphemy; what need we any further witnesses? He is guilty of death." Such you see, was the ground on which at last the Jews condemned our Lord. Once before they had sought to stone Him, and now they did actually condemn Him to death, *because He called Himself the Son of God*. For they had a law, as they afterwards stated to Pilate, by which He ought to die, "because he made himself the Son of God." This then was the charge upon which the Great Council of the Jews condemned Jesus to be guilty of death.

E. And I suppose, if He had not really been the Son of God, it would have been very wicked to have said so?

M. Certainly it would; and in that case the sentence of death would have been a just one. To have claimed to be the Son of God, and so to have

made Himself equal with God, had He not been so, would have been blasphemy. And by the law of Moses blasphemy was punishable with death; as you may see in Lev. xxiv. 16. But Jesus is the Son of God: He is so in that sense in which we could not apply it to any created being without blasphemy.

How does it strengthen our faith in our Lord's Divinity to find Him so solemnly asserting it on such an occasion as this! Before His birth it was said by the Prophet, "They shall call his name Immanuel, which, being interpreted, is God with us;" and now He claimed it as His own, though death was to be the consequence.

But though this is true beyond all dispute, what rage, what animosity did it excite in the minds of His enemies! Now began that shameful usage of His sacred person, which makes us shudder as we read. "Then did they spit in his face and buffeted him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands, saying," in rude mockery, "Prophecy unto us, thou Christ." "O holy Jesus, what a beginning was there here of thy bitter cross and passion! there thou standest bound, condemned, spit upon, buffeted, derided by malicious sinners. Thou art bound, who camest to loose the bands of death; thou art condemned, at whose sentence the world must quail; thou art spit upon (O shameful insult!) that art fairer than the children of men; thou art buffeted, in whose mouth was no guile; thou art derided, who art clothed with glory and majesty." And there thou didst stand in patient majesty; receiving all this at the hands of those for whom thy blood was to be poured out! Oh! how does the love of Jesus pass our understandings!

But how must even these sufferings have been aggravated by the circumstance, that at such a moment His disciples had all forsaken Him and fled ! Two of them, indeed, Peter and John, had so far overcome their fears as to follow Jesus ; not however as attached disciples, but afar off, as if they had been only curious or indifferent spectators. In this way they followed Him even into the court of the high priest's house, where John, being known, obtained admission for Peter also. Affection indeed brought them thither, although they had not the courage to show it openly. Again "the spirit was willing," but how "weak the flesh !" How little did Peter think what a lesson of self-humiliation he was here to learn. What a deep view of his own weakness he was to obtain, and how utterly and for ever he should be led to renounce that self-confidence, which, only a few short hours before, had led him to exclaim, "Though I should die with thee yet will I not deny thee !" But we must see how all this came to pass.

It was night you see when all this happened ; and Peter had probably expected that he should not be noticed, even if there were any present, who might have seen him before with the Lord Jesus. He did not of course foresee all the little circumstances, so trifling in themselves, which should hurry him on from one sin to another, and end at last in his shame and misery. The night was cold ; and the servants of the high priest had made a fire in the midst of the court-yard below, at which they stood warming themselves, and Peter, most likely on purpose to avoid suspicion, stood with them and warmed himself, wishing to see the end of the examination of Jesus, which was going on in the palace, or court. And there came one of the maids

of the high priest, who, observing Peter's countenance as he sat warming himself by the fire, and remembering probably that he was the same person who had come in with John, or being struck perhaps with some expression of anxiety, or fear, or sorrow, which might well have appeared in his countenance, accused him at once of being one of Jesus' followers. But Peter denied before all, pretending not even to know what the woman meant !

E. O Mamma, is it possible ? could that have been Peter ?

M. I do not wonder that you are surprised, even though you were aware that he would deny his Master ; there is something, when we come to the point, so false and base in such conduct. Can this indeed be Peter ? But, alas ! his fall was deep, as well as sudden. Not once, not even twice, did he repeat those dreadful words, " I know him not ;" but again and again, and that in spite of warning ; for scarce had he denied his God, than the cock crew, as Jesus had foretold. I dare say he was disturbed by the sound, but he was not awakened by it to a sense of his guilt—he soon returned again to the spot, from which he had retired, after the maid had spoken, perhaps to hide his confusion ; for the voice of conscience will make itself heard and felt : but he returned, and was again charged with being one of Christ's disciples, his Galilean dialect betraying him to the people : but he again denied it with a wicked oath, saying, " I do not know the man." Another hour passed away ; what a miserable hour it must have been to Peter ! once more he was charged in like manner, not by one person only, but by several, amongst whom was a relation of Malchus, the man

whose ear he had cut off in the garden of Gethsemane. If Peter had been alarmed before, how much more frightened must he have been, when this person asked him, "Did I not see thee in the garden with him?" Then Peter "began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man."—So weak is human nature, when left to itself. Is this the Peter, who had so recently declared that he was ready to go with Jesus to prison and to death? Can this be he who, almost more than all the rest, had loved his blessed Lord? Is this the loyal, the zealous, the courageous Peter, whose zeal in Gethsemane it had been necessary to restrain? yes, even he falls, when divine support is withheld; just as Adam, and Moses, and David, and Hezekiah, and many a saint had done before, all warning us most solemnly of the danger of trusting in ourselves. Unhappy Peter, who can imagine what he must have felt, when, just as those dreadful oaths had fallen from his lips, the cock crew again.

E. And did the crowing of the cock this time bring him to himself?

M. I doubt not that the cock might have crowed in vain, if Jesus had still left him to himself; but "amidst all His own misery He found time to think of His frail and ungrateful disciple." "Though He was upon His trial for His life, even then did Christ find leisure to think upon Peter, and give him a pitiful, but piercing look; a look that melted his heart, and dissolved it into tears." We read that the Lord turned and looked upon Peter; and Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said unto him, "before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice; and Peter went out and wept bitterly." That look from his

injured Lord, full no doubt of pity and tender remonstrance, had pierced his soul, had awakened his memory, had aroused his attention to the danger he was in, had caused him to listen at length to the predicted warning, had filled him with contrite sorrow—"Peter went out and wept bitterly." His repentance was *sincere*; for he sought a place of retirement, where he might weep in secret; it was *deep*, for he "wept bitterly;" and we know that it was *lasting*, for we read ever after of his devoted love to that Saviour, whom he had denied on this one occasion, but never again for ever. Oh, no! we shall hear some day of his dying for Christ, but never again of his denying Him: and we are told by writers of Church history, that ever after, when St. Peter heard the crowing of a cock, he fell upon his knees and mourned under the recollection of his sin. How much more interesting is Peter weeping, than Peter boasting!

We have then in this favoured, but now fallen disciple of Christ, a warning against self-confidence, but an example also of deep and speedy repentance. Through frailty, through surprise, he fell, and that into a grievous sin; but no sooner was his conscience awakened, than his tears began to flow. There was no delay—the moment "he thought thereon, he wept." His sorrow too bore some proportion to his offence. It was not a mere acknowledgment of having done wrong, such as we are too apt to content ourselves with. There was deep affliction in his repentance.

We cannot read of the repentance of Peter, without thinking how different it was from the repentance of Judas, of which we are told a few verses further on,

and shall therefore come to presently, as we trace the course of this solemn history.

We have already seen Jesus condemned by the high priest and the elders to be guilty of death; and how all manner of insults were heaped upon Him, by the unfeeling officers, into whose charge He had been given. We have seen how they mocked, and smote Him, and spat in His face, and how the very servants did strike Him with the palms of their hands; so truly were fulfilled the words of the prophet Isaiah, "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; I hid not my face from shame and spitting." We have seen too how our blessed Lord was tried, still more painfully than this, by the denial of Peter, so vehemently, so awfully made in the presence of them all. Still further trials, however, awaited Him. When that night, that dreadful night, was gone by, the Jewish authorities assembled their great Council, or Sanhedrim as it was called, consisting of seventy or seventy-two of the elders of the people, and of the priests; this was their chief tribunal, which had been kept up amongst them, probably from the time of Moses, who was expressly commanded to gather seventy men of the elders of Israel, to assist him and Aaron in the government of the people. Before this great council of the nation Jesus was brought; and in the morning, on His again declaring Himself to be the Son of God, they began seriously to consider how they should accomplish the sentence, already pronounced against Him; how they should put Him to death.

E. Were there any difficulties in the way of their doing this?

M. The Sanhedrim was no longer, as it had once been, the supreme authority of the country. Judea was now, you know, a Roman province, and even the Sanhedrim was obliged to submit to Roman authority. It might pass, but it could not *execute* a sentence of death, without the consent of the Roman governor, who at this time was Pontius Pilate. Here then was their difficulty ; and no slight one, for the Roman governor was not likely to permit any one to be put to death on a merely religious ground. They determined, however, to accomplish their purpose if possible, by bringing some charge which should persuade Pilate to comply with their desires. And in such haste were they to do this, that, while it was yet early in the morning, they led Him away to the Roman hall of judgment, and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate. Thus, as far as they were concerned, the death of Jesus was determined upon ; it waited only for the Roman sanction.

And now, Edward, we have a melancholy case before us. Just at this time the miserable Judas is spoken of again : we are told that when he found the consequences of what he had done—when he saw that his covetousness had led not only to the apprehension of his Master, but that it would be the occasion of His death, he was seized with horror at his crime, with deep and dreadful remorse ; not with *repentance*, for that is a godly sorrow which leadeth to eternal life ; but with *remorse*—the stings of a guilty conscience—the sorrow of the world which worketh *death*—death, sometimes, even in this world, as in the case of Judas, and eternal death in the world to come. Conscience had resumed her power in the breast of

Judas—that dreadful power with which she scourges the wicked—not the healing, though painful, power with which she leads the penitent to bewail and forsake his sin.

E. Like Simon Peter, Mamma.

M. Yes; Peter wept for his sin, and at once forsook it; and most probably he tried immediately to strengthen his brethren according to his Lord's command, who had made this his especial duty at this awful season¹. Judas also was filled with sorrow; but a sorrow which plunged him into further crime, even that most dreadful of all crimes, self-destruction.

E. What! did he kill himself, Mamma? did he take himself into the presence of God with all his sins upon his head? How very dreadful!

M. Most dreadful indeed: but it is too true that such was the wretched end of this miserable man. We find that the money, which had tempted him to all this wickedness, became an abhorrence to him; and that not being able to bear the possession of it any longer, he took it again to the chief priests and elders, "saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood." And they said, cruelly, "What is that to us? see thou to that." Those who tempt us into sin, feel little at the sight of the misery which sin is sure to bring with it. "And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself." What a melancholy case! What an awful lesson on the danger of covetousness! What a dreadful proof how sure conscience is at last to recover her dominion, and to

¹ St. Luke xxii. 32.

punish those who trifle with her admonitions ! It is fearful too to think how men will go on stifling the whispers of conscience and drowning her unwelcome voice in the clamour of their own evil passions. What a dreadful proof have we of this in the conduct of the chief priests, which we have just noticed. We have seen how little they were affected, when they saw the agony of Judas ; their consciences were not even then awakened ; and so it often happens that wicked men live to the last, nay even die in their sins, having their consciences " seared," as it were, by the grievousness of their transgressions : yet if conscience should sleep even to the last in this world, it is only to awake with more terrific power in the world to come, " where the worm never dieth, and the fire is not quenched."

In the persecutors of Christ we behold conscience asleep, and their eyes blinded to the danger of their situation ; so blinded, that they saw not how, at every step they took, they were fulfilling against themselves the prophecies of their own Scriptures.

E. How was that now, Mamma ?

M. They took back the thirty pieces of silver, which they had given Judas for betraying Christ, and bought with the money a field to bury strangers in ; for they could not, they said, put it into the treasury, because it was the price of blood ; though the bargain was one of their own making ! Bad men too are generally superstitious ; and I dare say they would have been afraid to have kept this money. But in this very act they were accomplishing what the prophet, nearly six centuries before, had said they should do. " They took," saith the Lord by His prophet,

“ the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value; and gave them for the potter’s field, as the Lord appointed me.” So wonderfully does the divine Providence overrule both the weakness and the wickedness of men to the divine glory, bringing good out of evil continually, and causing the light of heavenly truth to shine forth amidst the darkest scenes of human crime and folly.

See *Matt.* xxvi. 57—xxvii. 10. *Mark* xiv. 53—72.
Luke xxii. 54—71. *John* xviii. 12—27.

FIFTY-FIFTH SUNDAY EVENING.

CHRIST BEFORE PILATE.

M. I told you last Sunday how Jesus was taken very early in the morning to the judgment-hall of Pilate; and that the charges already brought against Him before the Sanhedrim, even if they had been as just as they were wicked, were not sufficient to obtain a sentence of death from the Roman governor. Accordingly when they brought Christ before Pilate, they were obliged to have recourse to some fresh charge.

E. But what could they find to say against Him?

M. This was the difficulty. At first they tried to bring a sort of general charge against Him, saying to Pilate, “If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up unto thee;” expecting the governor, without any further inquiry, to confirm their sentence. But the Romans were for the most part strict in ad-

ministering justice ; and Pilate accordingly, though willing to please the Jews, would not consent to condemn any one unheard ; but proposed, instead, that they should take Him and judge Him according to their own law, inflicting such a punishment as was still permitted to them ; such as St. Paul alludes to, when he says that at five different times he received stripes at the hands of the Jews. But this did not satisfy the malice of the Sanhedrim. They were bent upon our Lord's death ; and as they could no longer inflict that penalty themselves, they persisted in leaving Jesus in the hands of the governor ; thus fulfilling our Lord's own prophetic words, " Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the Scribes ; and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles."

E. And so, Mamma, they were themselves proving Christ to be a prophet.

M. Yes ; and that, too, at the very moment when they were condemning Him as a malefactor. When Pilate found that he could not persuade the Jews to be content with some lighter punishment than death, he returned into the judgment hall, and called Jesus to him : for the Jews would not go in, for fear they should contract some defilement which would unfit them to celebrate the passover.

E. Oh ! what deceitful men, Mamma ! as if murder and all manner of false dealings were not worse in God's sight than going among the heathen.

M. So deceitful, Edward, is the heart of man when given up to its own wickedness ; so readily does it "strain at the gnat whilst it swallows the camel." They thought murder no defilement, but to enter into a

gentile court, that would pollute them ! Yet here it was they took the holy Jesus. But real holiness is not contaminated by outward things. Like the light it passes amidst things unclean, yet remains pure and heavenly. So was Jesus undefiled when called by Pilate into his hall of judgment.

As yet the Roman governor had received no direct charge against our blessed Lord. But he could hardly be in Jerusalem without hearing something of Him, without having his mind in some degree prejudiced against Him by his artful persecutors, or without having been told of what had taken place when Jesus approached Jerusalem, and how the multitudes about Him had made the air resound with the cry, "Blessed be *the king* that cometh in the name of the Lord." Here then was alarm enough even for a Roman governor. True there was so much in our Lord's appearance and circumstances to contradict this idea, and make it altogether incredible, that we do not find the chief priests bringing forward the charge at first; but we find Pilate asking, as if in surprise, perhaps in mockery: "Art *thou* the king of the Jews?" As if He had said, "can it be possible that one so meek and lowly, so poor and powerless, can pretend to be a king."

E. But I dare say our Lord told Pilate that He was so, just as plainly as He declared to Caiaphas that He was the Son of God?

M. He did indeed make that "good confession",¹ only explaining that His "kingdom was not of this world;" not one which depended upon worldly power or glory, but a heavenly kingdom, the reign of truth.

¹ 1 Tim. vi. 13.

Then said Pilate unto Him, "What is truth?" Oh! that he had asked this question seriously! but a momentary anxiety, perhaps, there might have been to be set right on this important subject: but it was only momentary, for he went out again unto the Jews without waiting for an answer; convinced indeed that Jesus was innocent, but not inclined to listen to His instruction. Justice, however, compelled him to acknowledge that Christ had committed no crime. "I find in him no fault at all." "Oh! noble testimony to the innocence of Jesus from that mouth which afterwards condemned Him to death!" So far, you see, Pilate was just, and we find that he was merciful too, and wished to save Jesus from an unrighteous sentence. For he went to the Jews, and reminded them that it was a custom among them, that, at every celebration of the passover, some one prisoner was to be released from prison and punishment; and he offered therefore to release Jesus. But they all cried, saying, "Not this man, but Barabbas; now Barabbas was one who for sedition made in the city, and for murder, was cast into prison." Thus did they "refuse the Holy One, and the just, and desire a murderer to be granted unto them."

E. But would not Pilate be very wrong if he consented to this? ought he not to have done as he thought right, and to have protected an innocent person from the rage of the people, and from those wicked high priests?

M. There are very different opinions of the conduct of Pilate on this occasion. We must observe that our Lord treats him all along with a degree of consideration, and merciful allowance for his difficulties, as well

as for his ignorance, which He did not show towards His Jewish judges: nor can we say what effect our Lord's conduct and words may have had upon him. He had told him of His heavenly kingdom, and this led, even at the moment, to some inquiry in Pilate's mind: may it not afterwards have wrought on that mind, until, as an old Christian writer asserts, it brought to the foot of the Cross the very heathen magistrate who ordered the crucifixion? Certain it is, at any rate, that Pilate showed great anxiety to avoid putting Jesus to death. He did, indeed, permit Him to be scourged, that is, to be "examined by scourging," as was the practice then, for the purpose of extorting the truth from those who were accused. He did also suffer the soldiers to put a crown of thorns and put it on His head; to put on Him a purple robe, with a reed as a sceptre in His hand, and to salute Him in mockery as a king, mingling with their mockery rudeness and insult; for they smote Him with their hands. But perhaps he hoped by complying so far with the passions of the Jews, and with the feelings of his own soldiers, who were Cæsar's subjects, to save Jesus from more violent treatment. Perhaps he brought Him out to them arrayed in the mock robes of royalty, for the very purpose of showing them the absurdity of charging such a man with treason, or of suspecting Him of any such intentions as those with which they had charged Him. But, unhappily, the effect was only to enrage His enemies still more. They now began loudly to call upon Pilate to put Him to death; crying out continually, "Crucify him, crucify him!"

E. I cannot bear to think of the rude insults, which those wicked men heaped upon our blessed Redeemer;

■ that crown of thorns, those purple robes, that reed
■ in His hand, just to pretend that he was a king. Oh!
■ Mamma, it is dreadful to hear of.

■ *M.* It is indeed; especially when we think for a
■ moment how glorious and divine that Being was, who
■ bore all this, bore it so patiently, for us men and for
our salvation. How little did Pilate, or the soldiers,
or the Jews consider what it was that they were about!
“ They little thought that the time would come when
He whom they now saw so base should be glorious
in another dress than that which He now wore: when
He should shine, whom they now made to bleed: when
that crown, now so ignominious and painful, should be
at once majestical and precious: when they, who now
bent the knee to Him in scorn, should see all knees
both in heaven and earth, and under the earth, bow
before Him in awful adoration: when they, who now
looked upon Him with contempt, should behold Him
with honour.”

But we must proceed with this melancholy history.
The chief priests and officers had loudly called upon
Pilate to crucify Jesus, and the reason they gave for
it was, “ because he made himself the Son of God.”
But these words produced a different effect upon
Pilate from what they intended. He had feared already
to put Jesus to death; He was still more afraid, when
he heard that He called Himself the Son of God.
He accordingly went again into the judgment hall,
and saith unto Jesus, “ Whence art thou?” But
Jesus gave him no answer. Then said Pilate speak-
est Thou not unto me? knowest Thou not that I have
power to crucify Thee, and power to release Thee,
Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all

[*Second Series.*]

c c

against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore He that delivered me unto thee, hath the greater sin." Struck with the mildness of this reply, Pilate tried from this time to release Jesus altogether, although he had already given the Jews their choice between Him and Barabbas. "But the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend." And thus was Pilate driven to bring Jesus forth to a public trial, in an open place called the Pavement; it being now the commencement of the day on which the Paschal lamb was to be sacrificed. St. John distinctly points this out when he says, "*It was the preparation of the Passover.*" Yes, they were preparing to offer up a Lamb declared by the sacrificer himself, after repeated examination, to be altogether faultless, "without blemish and without spot."

It so happened that Herod Antipas, Tetrarch of Galilee, the same who had beheaded the faithful Baptist, "was at Jerusalem at that time." And Pilate, finding that Jesus was of Galilee, determined at last to send him to Herod, to whose jurisdiction he more immediately belonged; hoping possibly that Herod, not liking a rival to his crown, would carry him away to Galilee and try Him there. But Herod seems to have had no such fears, though the chief priests tried all they could to produce them. He had seen, I dare say, enough of John, and heard enough of Jesus in Galilee, to feel very sure that worldly dominion was not what either John or Jesus sought for. He was however very glad when he saw Jesus; having long wished to see Him; for he had heard a great deal about Him, and he hoped now that he should see some

miracle done by Him. Though Herod was far from being a good man himself, he was one of those who could not but respect, and even in some degree take pleasure in, the goodness of others. We were told long ago that he “feared John, because he was a just man and a holy;” and not only so, but that he protected him, heard him teach, and did many things gladly which John recommended.

E. And did our Lord then work some great miracle before him?

M. No; to a wicked and adulterous prince, the husband of Herodias, the murderer of John, no sign was granted: and Herod, pretending to despise the prisoner, and treating with scorn his supposed intention of taking His throne away from Him, mocked Him and sent Him back gorgeously arrayed to Pilate.

E. I am sorry for that. I suppose Pilate would now have no excuse for not condemning Him?

M. He tried again to show the Jews the absurdity of wishing to put Jesus to such a shameful and cruel death, which was only inflicted upon the worst criminals, for no better reason than that He had called Himself their king. But neither reason nor shame, nor the ancient feelings of the Jews, could avail now. They, whose dearest hope was the coming of the Messiah as their king, and who hesitated on this very account to pay tribute to Cæsar, now, in their malice against Jesus, exclaimed, “We have no king but Cæsar.” Pilate however knew very well that it was mere envy that had led the chief priests to take all these steps against Jesus, and he again declared that neither he nor Herod could find any fault in Him. Indeed he became more and more reluctant to consent to the

death of Jesus, for his wife had had a dream which disturbed her very much ; and she sent at the very time that Pilate was on the judgment seat, to entreat that he would "have nothing to do with that just man."

Vain, however, were all his attempts to save our Lord. The chief priests now persuaded the multitude to ask to have Barabbas given to them, and to destroy Jesus. And thus at length Pilate was persuaded, for the sake of avoiding a tumult, to give sentence against Christ: perhaps as guardian of the public peace he thought it his duty to make this concession to what appeared a strong and general feeling ; but even then he protested against the deed as one of violence, not of justice. "For when he saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person, see ye to it."

E. Ah ! but water could not wash away the sin of Mamma, of condemning Jesus to death ?

M. No, my dear child, *we* know well that it could not, though this poor heathen governor was probably superstitious enough to think it might. At any rate it was an expressive way of shewing that he abhorred the act, which they were compelling him to commit. It was as much as to say, "If you will commit this crime, you must ; but I will have nothing to do with it." And oh how dreadful was the answer of the people ! "His blood be upon us, and upon our children." What an awful curse to bring down upon themselves ! Little did those desperate Jews think what they were saying. Little did they know

the weight of that blood, which they were wishing upon themselves and their children ! We, who know what their history has been from that time to this, shudder as we read. Alas ! has not that blood been upon them ? Eighteen hundred years have now passed since they wished themselves thus wretched ; and wretched they have indeed been to the utmost extent of the word. Poor deluded people ! “ have they not been ever since the hate and scorn of the world ? did they not, many of them, live to see their city buried in ashes and drowned in blood ? have they not lived to see themselves no nation ? was there ever a people under heaven, that were made such a spectacle of misery and desolation ? ” We must leave the dreadful deed, which followed these awful words, for our consideration another evening.

E. Will you just answer me one question, before we leave off ? I am rather puzzled about Pilate. I always thought he was a very bad man, who allowed himself to be driven to act against his conscience for fear of giving offence.

M. I do not pretend, Edward, to take Pilate’s part ; at the same time we must be careful not to go beyond what is written, especially in exaggerating the crimes of our fellow creatures. Surely it is not the part of charity to magnify the crimes even of the dead ; who, though departed from this world, are living still in another. Many of these, though evil spoken of here, may, for ought we know, be in bliss on high. In judging of Pilate’s character, we must remember, that he was a heathen, and a Roman governor ; a stranger to the Jews and their religion, and still more a stranger to the religion of Christ.

Had he known what we know, then indeed he would have been extremely wicked to have consented to the death of Jesus. As it was, he did all he could to prevent this dreadful deed, and merely gave way at last because he feared a tumult in the city, which it was his duty as a governor to prevent, and in which much other blood might have been shed, together with the blood of Jesus. How far Pilate ought to have acted otherwise, how far he could have done so, it is difficult for us to say. Looking upon Jesus as one innocent of any crime against the state, he ought, we may say, to have protected Him; but then we must not forget what confusion, what loss of blood, what fierce rebellion would probably have been the consequence of such a step. Is it not almost too much to expect a heathen governor to have done more for Jesus than Pilate did?

E. Thank you, dear Mamma; I think I understand it better now: and if Pilate did really after all become a Christian, I am sure we ought to rejoice in that, and that our blessed Lord would rejoice in it too.

M. Yes, Edward, we may indeed be sure, that though he could not save Jesus, our Lord would and could save him, and admit even Pilate to be a partaker in the benefits of that death, to which he was, reluctantly it should seem, yet so awfully instrumental.

See *John* xviii. 28—xix. 16. *Matt.* xxvii. 11—26.
Mark xv. 2—15. *Luke* xxiii. 2—25.

FIFTY-SIXTH SUNDAY EVENING.

THE CRUCIFIXION.

M. We are now come, Edward, to the closing scene of our blessed Redeemer's life; to that event to which our thoughts have been directed, ever since we first began to study the Scriptures together.

E. Do you mean that we are really going to hear to night of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ? I have somehow or other been expecting all the time, that He would not really be put to death: but I forgot, Mamma, how sad it would have been for us, if Jesus had not died.

M. The death of Christ was indeed so necessary to our salvation, that, melancholy as it is to hear of it, we could not wish it otherwise. If, indeed, we would obtain a just view either of our own sins, or of that love with which He loved us, we must not shrink from following our blessed Saviour even to the cross. *There* and only there, we see the exceeding sinfulness of sin: there, and only there, can we at all find out what the Apostle meant, when he spoke of "the height, and depth, and length, and breadth of the love of Christ." But that you may judge better of this, we must go on with the melancholy narrative.

When Pilate had at length delivered Jesus to be crucified, the soldiers of the governor had assembled round the holy victim, and put on Him again a scarlet robe and a crown of thorns, and a reed in His hand; and bowing the knee in insolent mockery before Him, they saluted Him, saying, "Hail king of the Jews!" How little did they think that He was really their

king, and, that in due time, God would send forth the rod of His power out of Zion, to break in pieces like an earthen vessel those who thus set themselves against it. But they knew not what they were doing; they knew not whom they were insulting; and accordingly they went on to treat Him with all manner of indignity: even spitting on Him, and striking His head with the reed He held in His hand. And after they had mocked Him, they stripped Him of the purple robe, and putting His own raiment on Him again, they led Him away to crucify Him, compelling the holy sufferer, it seems, to bear the painful load of His own cross, until He came beyond the streets of Jerusalem.

E. Then they were taking our Lord out of Jerusalem: where were they going?

M. It was the Jewish as well as the Roman custom to execute offenders without the city or camp, as we may see in the time of Moses. (Numb. xv. 35.) They therefore led the holy Jesus to a hill called Golgotha; a spot set apart on purpose for the execution of malefactors; and supposed to have been called Golgotha in the Hebrew, and Calvary in the Latin language, because in shape it resembled a human skull. I think you may possibly remember something of Mount Calvary. To this spot Jesus now approached, not indeed at this moment bearing His cross, for that had been removed, probably as being too heavy for our Lord, especially after His recent agony and scourging, and other bodily trials, which might cause Him to move to the place of execution more slowly than His enemies desired: so they placed the cross upon the shoulders of one called Simon, a man of Cyrene, who had met

the melancholy procession just as it left the city. We are not told why it was put upon him, nor yet whether he was one of the disciples of Christ; but merely that he was *compelled* to carry this heavy load. But who would not esteem him highly honoured and happy in being thus employed?

Nay, if Simon had done it willingly, instead of by necessity, who would not have envied him “the honour of being the first to bear that cross of his Saviour, which thousands of blessed martyrs have, since that time, been ambitious to carry after him¹?” But we have no need to envy Simon, a cross more painful even than the one he bore, has been appointed for each one of us, and we must learn, by God’s grace, to glory in it. The Lord Jesus has expressly told us, that if we do not take up our cross and follow Him, we cannot be His disciples. But if we would really do this, if we would really bear affliction or crucify sin, we must often accompany our Redeemer, in our hearts and affections, to the gloomy hill of Golgotha, and dwell with increasing love and gratitude on all He suffered there. We must not hurry over this painful scene: we must rather dwell on every little circumstance, believing that each was recorded either to confirm our faith, or to kindle our love, or to increase, and deepen, and strengthen our gratitude. For we were the cause of all that happened there.

But I must not forget to mention an affecting circumstance, which occurred just as our Lord was leaving the city; an extraordinary instance of the manner in which the blessed Jesus forgot Himself in His love

¹ Bishop Hall.

and pity for others. Surely we should have supposed that, at such a moment as this, He could not possibly have thought of any thing but His own anguish, both of mind and body. But we are told, that “there followed Jesus at this moment a great company of people, and of women, which bewailed and lamented him.” Yes; there were some even here, whose hearts revolted at the cruelties which they witnessed, and overflowed with pity for the holy Sufferer; some who could not restrain their tears, nor refrain from loud and open expressions of their grief. It is refreshing, in the midst of such an awful story, to turn to such a scene as this. We feel as if we might stop for a moment and join our tears to those of these weeping women; amongst whom, I dare say, was the holy mother of our Lord. No doubt the compassionate Saviour set a high value on those tears; no doubt He deeply felt for all who thus mourned for Him; and especially, if she were there, for the mother who had watched over His infancy: but the sight of their sorrow brought to His prophetic mind a time, not now far distant, when their tears should no longer flow for others, but for themselves. Turning, therefore to them with tenderest pity, He said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.”

E. Mamma, I think I know what our Saviour meant. Was it not the destruction of Jerusalem, when the poor women and mothers of the city would suffer such dreadful things?

M. When “the tender and the delicate woman should have her eye evil towards her husband and towards her daughter;” and should be tempted by the

extremity of her sufferings to devour herself the little one who had lain in her bosom. Yes, these were the sorrows which awaited the daughters of Jerusalem, and which, in the midst of His own afflictions, called forth those tender expressions of pity from the Saviour's lips. All unconscious of what was coming, they wept only for Him ; but He, who knew all, could think only of them.

But the sufferings which wrung the hearts of the women of Jerusalem, had no effect upon our Saviour's persecutors. They persisted still in their wicked purpose ; and on arriving at Golgotha they nailed to the cruel cross those hands which had been shedding among them blessings without number, those feet which had continually been going about doing good. To add to the indignity and shame of our Lord's sufferings, two others were led out to be crucified with Him, who were malefactors ; fulfilling the words of the prophet, " he shall make his grave with the wicked." Nothing in short was left undone, that could make our Saviour's death as ignominious as it was cruel, and which could take from it all those circumstances of dignity and honour which have often made death an object almost to be sought rather than shunned by worldly minds. How many do we meet with in the pages of history who have met death willingly for the sake of glory ; setting death and honour side by side, then looking on death undaunted. But no worldly glory attended the last moments of the Redeemer : in His death there was nothing but disgrace and dishonour : every thing was done, not only to wound his pure mind, and if we may so speak, to irritate His feelings ; but, if possible, to load His blessed

memory with shame. But of irritation, though in the midst of the foulest indignities, the Son of God was quite incapable. Though nailed to the accursed tree, and that with a malefactor on His right hand, and a malefactor on His left, no angry words, no murmuring sounds, no impatient exclamations escaped His lips. Anger, murmuring, impatience ! did I mention such things in connection with the name of Jesus ? These are the tempers and failings of imperfect and sinful beings like ourselves : they never had for a moment a place in His holy, peaceful breast. Though the storm of trouble raged fiercely round His holy head, though all the waves and billows of affliction went over Him, there was a sacred calm within which nothing could disturb. It is *sin*, not sorrow, that disquiets the heart of man : there was no sin in Jesus, and therefore no sorrow could long disturb the blessed serenity of His soul. Some words there were indeed which now and then burst from Him in the agony of His grief : but they were accents of pity and forgiveness ; intercessions for His murderers ; excuses for their crime : “ Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

Yet observe what it was they had done : they had accused Him of crimes He had never committed—of blasphemy against God, of treason against Cæsar : they had hurried Him about from place to place, bound like a criminal ; they had stripped, they had scourged, they had buffeted, they had mocked, they had insulted Him ; they had weighed down his sacred limbs with the weight of the cross ; they had placed Him between two thieves ! they had pierced His blessed hands and feet, nailing them to the tree ; oh ! whilst

He hung there in infamy, a spectacle to heaven and earth, they had taunted, and ridiculed, and reviled Him, wagging their heads and saying, "Thou, that destroyed the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself: he saved others, himself he cannot save. If he be the king of Israel, let him now come down from the cross." All this we behold him enduring, not only without resentment, but with pity for His enemies; yea He "endured the cross, despising the shame," for the sake "of the joy that was set before him." Ah! truly His murderers knew not what they did; they knew not the glory that should be the consequence of all this shame; nor to how many millions that death would be eternal life.

On the cross was placed the following inscription, written by Pilate in letters of Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, so that all the multitudes assembled at the feast might read it: "Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews."

E. Was it not very strange to call Him the king of the Jews, when that was one of the crimes of which they accused Him?

M. It was indeed; and the chief priests wished to have changed it, and to have put instead that "*he said*, I am king of the Jews." But Pilate refused to make any alteration, answering, "What I have written I have written;" as much as to say, "It is done, and done deliberately: it cannot be altered." Whether Pilate really believed Jesus to be in some sense king of the Jews; whether his mind was overawed by His innocence, His patience, and the many mysterious circumstances which attended His trial; or whether he only meant to show how foolish and unreasonable

was the charge of the high priest, we cannot say. But this we do know, that the title was a true one; and that in placing it on the cross Pilate did in a manner foretel our Saviour's kingdom, the kingdom of the cross. We see too how clearly he thus pointed out to the Jews the approaching fulfilment of their numerous prophecies, in which the Messiah was spoken of at once as a sufferer and a king.

E. Mamma, I know the death of the cross must have been a very painful one; but was it soon over?

M. In general it was not only a cruel, but a long and lingering death; the unhappy sufferer sometimes lived long upon that dreadful cross, even from three to nine days. But our blessed Redeemer seems to have hung there from nine o'clock in the morning till three in the afternoon. But in that short period there was time enough, both to suffer, and to do a great deal. Many interesting circumstances are related of those few but holy hours. In addition to the extreme bodily anguish which our Lord must have suffered whilst hanging in that painful position, His limbs racked and distended, His flesh torn with the nails, He seems to have endured much misery from thirst; but the only refreshment He could obtain was a sponge filled with vinegar.

E. I think that had been foretold?

M. Yes; almost every little circumstance that now occurred, had been particularly marked out by prophecy; indeed our Lord's chief motive in complaining of His thirst, is said to have been that the Scripture might be fulfilled which many hundreds of years before had said, "They gave me gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave vinegar to drink." For be-

fore they nailed Him to the cross, they had given Him “vinegar to drink mingled with gall,” as if it were a cordial to soothe, but one in mockery rendered too bitter to be received.

In several parts of the Bible we have the most distinct prophecies respecting every particular of our Lord's death ; but the twenty-second psalm gives such a lively picture of it, that we could almost suppose that the Psalmist had been one of the sorrowful witnesses of all that passed whilst our Saviour hung upon the fatal tree. Besides the verses I have just quoted from it, we find David there saying, “they pierced my hands and my feet ! I may tell all my bones : they stand staring and gaping upon me.” And the Evangelist mentions particularly, as we have seen, how the soldiers and chief priests and people stood beholding and reviling and mocking Him. Again David says, “They part my garments among them, and for my vesture they have cast lots :” accordingly we read, that “the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments and made four parts, to every soldier a part ;” and that when they came to the upper garment or coat, they did not divide that, but cast lots for it, because it “was without seam, woven from the top throughout.” Even the anguish of His soul too is here described. David begins this melancholy prophecy with the words, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me ? why art thou so far from helping me and from the words of my complaint ?” Nor was this a less faithful picture of the feelings of Jesus in that dreadful hour. His bodily sufferings, severe as they were, were nothing compared to the agonies of His mind : the accumulated sin of the whole world was laid

upon Him, and the full weight of that vengeance, which sin deserved, must now be borne; and, worse than all the rest, the light of God's countenance was withdrawn. No voice is heard on Calvary, to comfort Him with that blessed assurance, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased;" only that dismal cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" No angel was sent now to strengthen Him, but, alone and unsupported, He had to bear "the iniquity of us all," and the wrath which all that iniquity deserved.

For a little while even God, it is said, forsook Him; and then the Saviour's woe must have been complete. How hateful, Edward, must be the sins which caused such sufferings!

But there was triumph on the cross, as well as suffering—triumph in the midst of suffering, triumph indeed because of suffering. For the ground of all real triumph among men is the suffering of Christ. Let us pass on to those circumstances which have shed a heavenly radiance round the Redeemer's cross—those brighter tints which relieve this gloomy picture.

You have heard how two malefactors were crucified by the side of the pure and spotless Jesus; one of these miserable men joined the unfeeling multitude in railing at the Saviour, saying, "If thou be the Christ, save thyself and us:" but the other answering him rebuked him, saying, "Dost not thou fear God, seeing that thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this man hath done nothing amiss." Then turning to Jesus, he said, "Lord, remember me, when thou comest into thy kingdom."

E. Was not that very strange in a dying thief?

M. Indeed it was very extraordinary. We might almost think it the language of a long favoured disciple. This man had been, it seems, a malefactor and a thief; but justice had overtaken him, and, like the prodigal in the parable, he had awakened in the hour of affliction from his dream of sin: he had come at last to himself: perhaps the awful judgment which his crimes had brought down upon him, had been the blessed means, in God's hands, of leading him to repentance. But how long he had been thus penitent we are not told; nor can we tell what had been the circumstances of his early life, into what temptations he might have been thrown, or how far removed from the light of instruction, and the warning voice of truth. It is evident however that he is now filled with the fear of God. "*Dost not thou fear God?*" is his address to his companion in misery: he is sensible of his guilt, and acknowledges the justice of his punishment: these are all favourable proofs of a sincere repentance; but to repentance he adds faith—faith in a most uncommon degree; we might almost say such faith as had never been witnessed before. "He sees Jesus hanging miserably by his side, and yet calls Him Lord: he sees Him dying, and yet talks of His kingdom: He feels Himself dying, yet speaks of a future remembrance." He believes in Jesus, in His innocence, in the coming of His kingdom, and openly professes that faith, at a time when the very apostles had forsaken their Master; and when by such a declaration, he was likely to bring down upon himself the indignation of the chief priests, who might even yet have added to his tortures. It is indeed a bright

instance of repentance and faith!—happy those who thus truly repent, though late, of their sins; and thus simply and humbly, but stedfastly, lay hold of the salvation which is in Christ Jesus. Happier indeed, far happier, if they have done this earlier, and have been preserved by God's grace from any course of sin! but better it is to repent late, than not at all; although it is seldom, if ever, that *such* an opportunity can occur, of showing the sincerity of a late repentance and the reality of a new-born faith, as that which now presented itself in the case of this humbled malefactor. At that moment he was the *only one* on earth who openly confessed the Lord Jesus; the only one who clung to Him for salvation; the only one who had courage to brave the malice of his enemies; the only one who could look, with stedfast assurance, to his glorious kingdom, through all the obscurity of his sufferings, humiliation, and death. It was indeed the eleventh hour with this poor penitent; but who can say whether he had ever been called into the vineyard before, or ever before this heard of Jesus, or ever been warned of the wickedness of his own way. His case at least is a very extraordinary one; and dreadful would be the folly of that person, who should, in consequence of reading this story, put off his repentance and continue in sin. Then we must not forget that this penitent thief did not escape the present punishment of his sins; his repentance did not save him from a cruel and ignominious death: he was still “judged according to men in the flesh,” for the sins of which in the flesh he had been guilty, though “saved according to God in the spirit” upon his humble repentance and lively faith: judgment

followed him to the end in this world, as is generally the case with the rebellious sinner, who may by God's mercy in Christ, "save his soul alive," yet never escape those calamities, which the providence of God has appointed as the natural consequence of crime.

E. I suppose from what you say, Mamma, that our blessed Lord gave the poor thief a kind and gracious answer.

M. Beyond his utmost expectations. "Verily I say unto thee, to-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise." Amazing instance of the power and grace of Jesus ! What real penitent shall ever despair of mercy, when there is such a wonderful assurance of it in the word of God as this ? The repenting malefactor shall not only be *remembered* by his Saviour, when He cometh in His kingdom, but now, even now, in a few short hours he shall be with Him in Paradise ; in that blessed and peaceful state where the souls of the redeemed rest, after they have left their bodies of sin and death. What a blissful thought even in the agonies of death, even on the cross !

Christ had refused to come down from the cross at the taunting request of His enemies : He would not show His power by delivering Himself and leaving our salvation unfinished ; but He would give a noble proof that He was indeed the Son of God, by snatching a sinner from eternal death. If He had seen fit, His departing spirit might have been accompanied from Calvary by myriads of His redeemed people bursting forth from their graves¹ ; but He was content to bear away with Him but one human being : yet that one

¹ Milman's Fall of Jerusalem.

declared as loudly as all creation could have done, that this was He who hath the keys of death and of hell.

E. And now, Mamma, I suppose Jesus had nothing to do, but to die?

M. His departure drew near indeed; the prophecies were well nigh accomplished, and it would seem that there was nothing to detain Him here. But there was one care upon the Saviour's mind; one dear and sacred duty yet to be performed, one more affecting instance to be given of filial piety and love.

E. Was our Lord Jesus Christ thinking of His mother?

M. Yes, amidst the intensity of His own sufferings He could not forget her. He could not forget what she must have felt in witnessing the indignities that had been heaped upon her holy Son, in beholding all that He had endured, and was still enduring, on the shameful cross. He could not forget that He was about to leave her alone in this world of trouble, and that the sword, which had already gone through her soul, would pierce still more deeply when He was taken away from her. He who had said to the widow, "weep not;" who had shed tears at the grave of Lazarus; who had bestowed His sympathy and His help in every case that had come before Him; surely He would not be unmindful of His mother's woe. Let us see what the Gospel tells us. The beloved disciple St. John records that, "when Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, He saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home."

What a precious charge was here committed to the disciple whom Jesus loved ! The sacred care of watching over and protecting her who had been the earthly parent of the Redeemer ! He was to take her to his own home and be to her as a dutiful and affectionate child ; and thus to have sweet occasions, daily occurring, of testifying his love to his departed Lord. Thus did the blessed Jesus, in the midst of His bitter suffering, and on the very eve of His departure for paradise, provide for the comfort of His mother during the remainder of her stay in this world, securing for her the society and support of one who would be to her as a son.

“ Even from the cross He deigned to bow,
On her His agonized brow ;—
Her His sole earthly care.”

It is said of the fifth commandment that it is the first with promise. We might add that it was the last to receive the sanction of our Lord's example. In the agonies of death He commended it to our notice.

E. I suppose our Lord's sufferings were nearly over now ?

M. Yes ; “ there is no day so long, but it hath its evening,” and the painful sufferings of the Saviour were drawing at last to an end. The hour, the appointed hour, was fast approaching. It was the third hour of the day, or, as we reckon it, was nine o'clock in the morning, when the body of the holy Jesus was nailed to the ignominious cross. At noon of this awful day, an extraordinary darkness took place, which covered the whole land and continued for three hours, as if nature herself sympathized with the divine Sufferer, and the sun were ashamed to behold so foul a deed.

E. I suppose it was an eclipse that caused the darkness.

M. No ; the sun was not eclipsed, for it was now about the time of full moon ; and an eclipse of the sun cannot take place except at new moon, or rather a little before the first crescent of the moon appears, while she is as yet invisible to our eyes. The darkness was, as I have said, extraordinary, that is, out of the common course of things ; nor can we doubt that it was intended to mark with peculiar solemnity the event of our Lord's crucifixion, in which the powers of darkness seemed to prevail over the Lord of light and life. Nor was this the only strange sign that took place. "The sun was darkened," the Evangelist says ; and he adds, "the vail of the temple was rent in the midst ;" that is to say, the curtain which separated the holy of holies from the rest of the temple was rent asunder, as if to signify that the way into the true holy of holies, which hitherto had not been made manifest, was now by the death of Christ opened to all believers.

The darkness of which we have spoken lasted until three o'clock in the afternoon, the ninth hour of the Jews. Now the ninth hour was the very time of the day fixed in the law for the sacrifice of the Paschal lamb. "Between the two evenings¹," that is to say, between the afternoon and the later evening, the victim was to be slain.

Now it is very remarkable that the hour at which our Saviour expired, should agree exactly with this hour ; for it was at the ninth hour that Jesus uttered that mournful cry to which I have already alluded, saying with a

¹ Exod. xii. 6. Marg. tr.

loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabacthani," which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me ! It was then too that He said, "I thirst," and that the vinegar was put to His lips. And now, all things being accomplished which the prophets had foretold that the Christ should do or suffer, in order to the redemption of the world, "Jesus said, it is finished." "There was no more now to do: all predictions, all types and ceremonies, all sufferings and satisfactions were happily accomplished; and nothing now remained but that the Lord Jesus should yield Himself up with sweet and heavenly resignation into the hands of His eternal Father;—that He should bow His patient head, and closing His eyes to all that had vexed and grieved Him here, should enter at once into instant rest, triumph, and glory." "When Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost."

Such, Edward, is the history given us by the holy Evangelists, one of whom, as we have seen, was with Him to the last, of the closing scene of our Redeemer's life. So much did it cost to redeem our souls from the bondage of sin and death, and to make us heirs of the kingdom of Heaven ! May we ever remember the price at which we have been bought, and the claim which our Lord has in consequence to our unbounded gratitude and love !

See *Matt.* xxvii. 27—50. *Mark* xv. 16—37.

Luke xxiii. 26—46. *John* xix. 16—30.

FIFTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY EVENING.

THE BURIAL.

M. The Saviour's sufferings were now ended ; the price of redemption was paid ; the work was finished, which the Father had given the Son to do ; the cup of sorrow had been drunk to the very dregs ; Messiah had been cut off, and the body of the Just One hung lifeless upon the cross. But the signs which marked this solemn event were not yet completed. The vail of the temple had, indeed, been rent ; the sun had been darkened ; the heavens above had put on their mourning robes ; and now the earth quaked as if in awe at the death of One so holy ; the hard rocks were rent, as if to put to shame the heart of man, so much harder than themselves ; and Death, as if to acknowledge the victory which had been commenced over his power, as if in return for the ransom which had just been paid, began to give up his captives. For "the graves were opened, and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of their graves, and went into the holy city and appeared unto many."

E. What ! did the dead come to life again at the death of Jesus ?

M. So the Evangelist plainly declares. Dead they were certainly in the common sense of the word ; but the Scripture continually speaks, as you know, of the sainted dead as only asleep. Their life remained in them, waiting only the call of Christ to waken it again ; and to these holy men, who were thus called forth from their quiet graves, our Lord was pleased to grant the extraordinary privilege of rising immediately upon

His death, to go and give proof to their countrymen of His saving power.

These were the first fruits of His victory over the grave; gracious tokens that our ransom from the bondage of death had been paid, and was sufficient. The death upon the cross brought life into the tombs.

E. What effect had all this, Mamma, upon the persons who witnessed it?

M. Hitherto there had been scarcely any thing but mockery at the cross of Jesus: but now, when all these extraordinary things had happened, the very soldiers were filled with fear. Their centurion, in particular, when he saw the manner of our Lord's death, how at the very last He cried with so loud a voice, then, in the midst of His strength, expired at once, and when he saw, too, the earthquake and the darkness, "glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man: truly this was the Son of God!" Jesus had been put to death as a traitor against Cæsar, as an offender against the public peace; but now, by the mouth of the centurion, the voice of truth repeats the declaration of Pilate, "I find no fault in him." The chief priests had persecuted Jesus as a blasphemer for calling Himself the Son of God: and what now is the evidence extorted from an observer, who had most probably been prejudiced against the sufferer? "Truly this was the Son of God!"

Nor was it the soldiers only who were affected by what they had seen. The impression was general. Those whom curiosity had led to the spot, those too whom a blind zeal, it may be, had first driven on to join in the persecution of the "Holy One and the Just"—these and all the people, that came together to that

sight, glorified God, saying, "Certainly this was a righteous man."

Thus at the last did truth prevail; no sooner was the Saviour dead, than the Holy Spirit began already to convince men "of sin" in rejecting Him, and to declare the "righteousness" and innocence of our Lord whilst He still hung upon the accursed tree.

E. I wonder whether any of the friends or companions of Christ were among those people.

M. Yes; among the beholders were many of our Lord's own disciples. Some holy women especially are mentioned, who, while Jesus went about doing good, had ministered to His wants, and were still watching with unremitting affection to see the end. No wonder they should linger around that cross: no wonder they should be loath to leave the remains of one so justly dear. To them the miracles which took place, though full of awe, must have been full of consolation too.

E. Are the names of any of those faithful women given? For I should like to know who they were.

M. Their names were counted worthy to be mentioned in the word of God, and are therefore worthy also to be remembered by us. They were Mary Magdalen, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's children: for she who had once asked for her sons to sit next to her Saviour in heaven, had now seen that Saviour on the cross, and learned at last what our Lord meant when He spoke of that cup of which He was to drink, and of which they should afterwards partake. But the sabbath, which began at sunset, was approaching, and it was time to remove Jesus from the cross. Before,

however, He could be removed from that tree, prophecy must be once more accomplished. The sabbath, as I said, was coming on, the great paschal sabbath; and the Jews, having a particular reverence for that day, were anxious to have the crosses removed before it began; for they thought that if the bodies of persons who had been hanged remained on the cross on the sabbath, it would be a pollution both to them and to their feast. Alas! for the deceitfulness of the human heart! Without any compunction, nay with furious zeal, they crucified an innocent person; but they could not bear that His cross should appear on the sabbath day. As if the removal of the cross could remove their guilt, and the hands, which had that day been stained with blood, could be lifted up the next in holy worship; as if the lips, which a few short hours before had been crying, "Crucify him, crucify him!" might, on the coming sabbath, offer up the incense of prayer and praise in the temple of God! To sin during the week, to be devout on the sabbath, is, I fear, the self-deceiving religion of multitudes: but never was there so glaring an instance of it as this. And this strikes us more still, when we observe that, in order to make this preparation for the sabbath, the Jews actually went to Pilate to beg that he would allow them to hasten the deaths, and increase the torture of those who were crucified, by ordering their legs to be broken.

E. What wicked hypocrisy! What dreadful cruelty!

M. It was, indeed; but, as I said just now, prophecy was still to be accomplished. Accordingly, when the soldiers had broken the legs of the first and of the other which was crucified with Him, they came to Jesus intending to do the same in His case. "But

when they saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: but one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came thereout blood and water." Thus was the Scripture fulfilled, which had long ago declared, "A bone of him shall not be broken;" and again, "They shall look upon him whom they have pierced." The soldiers had not spared Him from any pity, but because He was dead already; and He who pierced His side seems to have done it in mere thoughtless cruelty: but both one and the other were equally under the control of the providence of God: both adding strong testimony to the divine nature of Him who was nailed to that cross. How wonderfully is our faith in Christ confirmed by circumstances which at first sight seem so trifling!

Thus once more did the fierceness of men turn to the praise of God, in the fulfilment of His holy word written a thousand years before: prophecy followed our Lord Jesus from the cradle to the cross; it attended Him still while He hung there—pointing to Him from first to last as the promised Messiah, the King of Israel, the Son of the Father.

Nor did prophecy leave Jesus at the cross. When the evening was come, "there came a rich man named Joseph of Arimathea, an honourable counsellor, who went in boldly unto Pilate" and begged that he might be allowed "to take away the body of Jesus."

E. Was he a disciple of Jesus?

M. We might have been very sure of this, even if the sacred historian had not told us so. Must he not have loved Jesus in order to have valued thus His sacred remains? Must he not have set a high value on this opportunity of honouring his Lord, when he

took so dangerous a step in order to accomplish it? How refreshing it is to come to such a character! to find that rank and riches do not always harden the heart, but that there are good men in the worst of times in high places, uncorrupted by wealth or greatness, or by that which is worse than either, evil example. Though one of the Sanhedrim, or great council of the nation, which had condemned Jesus, "he had not consented to the counsel and deed of them," but was "a good man and a just, who also himself waited for the kingdom of God." How agreeably are we surprised at meeting with such a man at such a moment! Never, till now, have we met with his name in the word of God; but how honourably does it stand there for ever!

E. And did Pilate grant Joseph his request?

M. Yes; Pilate marvelled awhile if the holy sufferer were dead already, not knowing that He had willingly yielded up His Spirit in the midst of His strength; but, on learning the fact, he commanded that His body might be given to Joseph. And how different the treatment it meets with now! With what tenderness are those sacred limbs removed from the painful cross! With what care and cost are the most precious spices employed in embalming it! How fine the linen in which it is wrapped! What an honourable, what an enviable office! I dare say Joseph of Arimathea never valued his riches so much as he did now, that they gave him an opportunity of showing so much respect and love for the Son of God. Yet Joseph was not selfish in his love: highly as he prized the sacred care that had devolved upon him, he was willing to share the honour and the satisfac-

tion of it with another. He did not think the happiness of it consisted in confining it entirely to himself. Who do you think was permitted to share in this labour of love?

E. I am sure I can never tell; unless it was the beloved disciple St. John.

M. You remember Nicodemus who came to Jesus by night; and of whom I told you before that you would hear of him again by and by.

E. What! Nicodemus so courageous? I should never have expected to find him here.

M. So completely can the grace of God change the natural temper and character. When we last heard of him, he sheltered himself under the darkness of the night, when he wished to visit our Lord: now we find him openly honouring the Son of God without any fear of the malice of the Jews; assisting Joseph in removing His body from the cross; and bringing a large quantity of costly spices, wherewith to embalm it.

Nor did the holy care of these good men end here. It happened that "in the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new sepulchre wherein was never man yet laid." It was a tomb belonging to Joseph of Arimathea, which he had hewn out of the rock; which he had prepared for his own burial, expecting one day to be laid there himself: for he perhaps might have been anxious, as many of the Jews are at this day, to lay his remains close to the Holy City. Little did he then think that he was preparing it for a far nobler inmate;—that it was to be the abode for a little while of Him, who, by that short visit, should triumph over death and the

grave for ever. Oh, happy Joseph, to have the honour of providing a shelter for the Lord of life : how well is the room thou gavest Him repaid with “ a mansion not made with hands, eternal in the heavens ! ”

“ Thus purely wrapped and sweetly embalmed,” the body of Jesus was laid in the quiet grave. During His ministry here on earth He had not indeed had where He could rest His head ; and at His death He had suffered with the wicked and the vile ; but now He is embalmed by one rich man, and buried by another in his own new tomb. How strange that a crucified person should receive such a burial ! But it was foretold in prophecy : it had been said by Isaiah that Messiah should be laid “ with the rich in his death ; ” that is, that He should be buried like a rich man though He suffered like a criminal ; “ because,” in reality, “ he had done no violence, neither was there any deceit in his mouth.” How wonderful is this coincidence !

E. When Joseph hewed his tomb out of the rock he little thought, I suppose, what he was doing ?

M. No ; he meant merely to provide a sepulchre for himself. But he was preparing one for his Saviour ; and hence came the fulfilment of a most important prophecy. So easily does divine providence overrule to its own purposes the actions of men, whether evil, good, or indifferent, though they act by their own choice, and think only of their own ends. But thus does God often perfect praise from the most unlikely circumstances. The voice of prophecy speaks amidst the silent dead : it re-echoes from the tomb.

Having laid the body of Jesus thus safely in the sepulchre, Joseph rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre and departed; not leaving the sacred remains wholly unattended, for Mary Magdalen and the other Mary had followed after, and still lingered for a time about that hallowed spot. But the Sabbath being at hand they too were obliged to go, and return to Jerusalem, to rest according to the commandment, which even their affection for their Lord could not lead them to forget.

Jesus rested, in the grave: the holy women and his other disciples rested also, at Jerusalem: not so the chief Priests and Pharisees. The fierce passions of their souls could find no repose; even on the Sabbath day their malice knew no rest. Though it was that great Sabbath, for which they had professed so high a regard, they went to Pilate requesting him to set a watch over the sepulchre of Jesus, lest, as they said, His disciples should steal him away, and tell the people that He was risen from the dead. Nay more, with the consent of Pilate, they went themselves and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch or guard; for they had heard that He had said that in three days He would rise again; and this His promise they expected to defeat by the measures which they now took.

E. I think I remember Darius sealing with his own seal the stone which had been put at the mouth of the lions' den, to prevent Daniel from escaping.

M. Yes; and several instances of the same precaution occur in ancient history.

E. I suppose the stone was a very large one, and

the guard a party of soldiers that were to watch by the grave ?

M. Exactly so : and thus they thought they were quite sure of the body of Jesus ; that none would be able to take it away : and if their prisoner had been a human being like themselves, they would indeed have been very sure. In this case how fruitless was all their care ! And yet it was permitted by God, and overruled by His infinite wisdom, in order to give the strongest proofs of the resurrection of His Son ; and to bring to nothing the daring falsehood of these wicked men, which they afterwards spread on every side, that the disciples stole away the body by night. What a foolish invention ! as if the disciples could have succeeded in such an attempt, when they had taken every precaution to prevent it ! when the body was laid in a new grave where there was no other corpse ; when this grave was hewn out of the solid rock, so that there were no means of entering it from behind ; and when its mouth was secured by a great stone, under a seal, and a guard of Roman soldiers under the strictest discipline, any one of whom would have been subject to a cruel death had he been known to sleep upon his post, or to neglect his charge. How vain was it thus to fight against the most High God, who can in a moment bring to nought the devices of wicked men ! But we may rejoice that the enemies of Christ took all this pains to prevent His being taken from the spot where Joseph had laid Him, as it gives us such overwhelming proofs of His resurrection ; that resurrection, on which our own depends, and on which indeed our whole religion rests. “ For if Christ be not raised, our faith is vain ; we are yet in our sins.

But now Christ is risen indeed ; and become the first fruits of them that slept.”

See *Matt.* xxvii. 51—66. *Mark* xv. 38—47. *Luke* xxiii. 45—56. *John* xix. 31—42.



FIFTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY EVENING.

THE RESURRECTION.

M. I told you last Sunday how the Marys and certain other holy women were the last persons who left the Redeemer's grave: how they had lingered there to the very last, and then were only drawn from the spot by the approach of the Sabbath day. We can easily imagine what a mournful Sabbath it must have been to them ; how slowly, how sadly, its sacred hours must have rolled by ; and how wistfully they must have looked for the time when they might once more hasten to their Saviour's tomb. We can imagine too the interest, the intense interest, with which they would approach that hallowed spot again. So intense indeed was their affection, that as soon as the Sabbath was past, whilst it was still dark, or only just beginning to dawn towards the first day of the week, they came with sweet spices, that with the earliest light they might anoint His sacred corpse. It was a melancholy visit which they had to pay. From death and the grave we all by nature shrink ; and strong, yea stronger than death, must have been that love which could have led two weak and timid women to venture to such a spot under such circumstances, and at such an hour, alone.

E. I wonder they were not afraid of those Roman soldiers too.

M. Their affection for their Saviour seems to have swallowed up every fear, and to have overcome every difficulty which lay in their way. The only impediment, which they seem to have thought of, was the stone which lay at the door of the sepulchre: for they said to themselves as they went along, "Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre? for it was very great." Imagine then the surprise of these holy women, when they approached the sepulchre, and, by the light of the then rising sun, beheld that the stone was already rolled away.

E. That was very extraordinary; was it not, Mamma?

M. It was, indeed, for the Evangelist tells us that "there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came, and rolled back the stone from the door and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and His raiment white as snow; and for fear of Him the keepers did shake and became as dead men." Great, no doubt, was the astonishment of these pious women; but it did not stop them in their holy purpose of anointing the body of Jesus. Finding the stone already rolled away, the Marys and their companions went into the sepulchre, little thinking what a disappointment awaited them there. The body of Jesus was gone already; and it came to pass whilst they were much perplexed thereabout, "behold two men stood by them in shining garments."

E. Who were they? Could they have been two of the apostles, who had reached the sepulchre before

the women ; or could they have been any of those holy men departed, come back to earth again, as Moses and Elijah did at the transfiguration ?

M. We have every reason to suppose that they were angels ; for, as I have already told you, it was an angel that rolled away the stone from the mouth of the sepulchre. Indeed, St. Luke afterwards expressly calls it a vision of angels which the women had seen. Yes, the heavenly hosts gladly minister to the Son of God. Had He desired it, twelve angelic legions would have hastened to His rescue in the garden of Gethsemane. We need not wonder then to find one or two in attendance at His tomb, to overpower the guard of His enemies, or to encourage the faith of His disciples. But human nature, in its frailty and consciousness of sin, shrinks from communion with the inhabitants of heaven. By and by we hope to be admitted into their sacred society, when our robes shall have been washed and made white like theirs : but whilst we still wear these bodies of sin and death, we could not enjoy it, even were we admitted into it. These holy women had hearts glowing with love for their Saviour, and yet they were affrighted at the heavenly vision, and with meek reverence “ bowed their faces to the ground.” Ah ! happy would it be for us, if we had never more cause for fear than they had now ! How must all their apprehensions have vanished in a moment, when one of the angels said unto them, “ Fear not ye ; for I know that ye seek Jesus which was crucified : but why seek ye the living among the dead ? He is not here, but is risen, as he said : ” —intimating plainly that the Lord of Life could not remain long in the grave, could not be holden of

death. He had gone down to the regions of the dead, only to throw open their gates; that the prisoners of hope there detained, might be able to come forth to the enjoyment of life, and that for ever. "He is not here," said the angel, "he is risen;" and then, to remove all doubt from the minds of these trembling women, he invited them to come and see for themselves the place where the Lord lay, and reminded them of our Lord's own words, which He had spoken to them when He was yet in Galilee, when He expressly told them that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again. And then, as if at once to remove their fears and disperse their sadness, he gave them a delightful commission, desiring them to go quickly and tell the disciples and Peter that Jesus was risen, and was already gone before them into Gallilee. And the women obeyed the word of the angel, and departed quickly from the sepulchre, their hearts trembling with fear, and amazed with the greatness of their joy; and they ran to bring His disciples word.

In making such haste, some, through their greater zeal or greater speed, would naturally outrun the rest; and by comparing the different Gospels carefully together, we seem to learn that the first to bring the intelligence of what they had seen at the sepulchre was Mary Magdalen, who told it to Peter and John, and having done so, probably returned herself immediately to the sepulchre.

E. I wonder whether the Apostles believed the account of the women?

M. Not at first: "their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not." Peter and

John, however, could not rest, until they had ascertained the truth of the account which Mary Magdalen had brought : so they ran both together to the sepulchre, and looking in saw the linen clothes, in which our Saviour had been buried, carefully laid in different places : then they believed what they had heard, and departed wondering at what had come to pass.

E. But none of them had found our Saviour yet ?

M. No ; as yet our Lord, though risen from His grave, had not appeared to any of them. Yet He did not long withhold this comfort from His still sorrowing disciples. And the one who seemed to mourn for His loss the most, was the first object of the Saviour's care. Mary Magdalen had returned to the sepulchre as soon as she had conveyed the joyful tidings to Peter and John ; and she stood without at the sepulchre weeping, unable to persuade herself that the Lord was really risen. Blessed tears were those which she then shed ! In a little while no traces of them should be left : they should be changed into smiles of gladness. We know who has said, "They that sow in tears shall weep in joy." How sweetly was this promise now fulfilled ! St. John tells us that, "as she wept, she looked into the sepulchre, and seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou ? She saith unto them, because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him. And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou ? whom seekest thou ? She, supposing him to be the gardener,

saith unto him, Sir, if thou hast borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus saith unto her, Mary." And now that voice is no longer strange unto her. In a moment she knows it to be the voice of Him whom her soul loveth; the voice of Him whom with tears she has been seeking. "As soon as Jesus said unto her, Mary, she turned herself and said unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master. Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father; and to my God and your God."

You can imagine how readily Mary undertook this condescending message from our Lord to His poor sorrowing disciples; how gladly she went again to them, and told them that she now had not only seen the stone rolled away, and witnessed the absence of the body from the tomb, and beheld a bright vision of angels who said that Jesus was alive, but that "she had seen the Lord Himself, and that He had spoken unto her." But the disciples could not be persuaded: they were still mourning, and weeping for the absence of their Lord, and still refused to be comforted with the joyful news which Mary had brought them: for they either forgot, or did not understand, the solemn promises which Jesus had made when He was with them.

Our Lord's second appearance seems to have been to the other women, who had accompanied Mary Magdalen at the dawn of day to the sepulchre. For St. Matthew relates that when the angel had informed them of the resurrection of the Lord, he said to them,

“Go quickly and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and behold he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: and as they went, behold Jesus met them, saying, All hail! And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren, that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.” Not that our Lord did not appear again until He showed Himself in Galilee: but that there He would make His appearance publicly to the great body of His disciples.

E. But was He seen in the mean time, Mamma, to any persons besides these holy women?

M. Yes, He was seen repeatedly in a more private manner by the apostles, and others, in and near Jerusalem. A very interesting account is given us by St. Luke of one of these appearances. He tells us that two of the disciples, one of whom was Cleopas, were going together to Emmaus, and as they went along, they were talking sorrowfully over all the melancholy circumstances of our Saviour's sufferings and death. And it came to pass, while they held this sacred communion with one another, “that Jesus himself drew near and went with them;” approaching them under the form of a stranger, but joining them as if he had been a friend in their evening's journey.

E. Ah, if He had known what they were talking about!

M. You forget, my child, that the Saviour is intimately acquainted with the words of our lips, and even with the thoughts of our hearts. But on this occasion, as He wished to remain unknown, He inquired with tender concern both the subject of their conver-

sation, and the cause of their sadness. The disciples expressed their surprise at the stranger's ignorance of all that had been lately passing in Jerusalem: they wondered much that he could have been there, and yet not have heard of Jesus of Nazareth, that "Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and the people," and how He had been condemned to death by the chief priests and rulers, who at last had crucified Him. And then they acknowledged that they had hoped that this same Jesus had been He who should have redeemed Israel, and added that they had been much astonished by accounts that had been brought them of angels who had appeared and said that He was alive. Happy was it for Cleopas and his companion that they had told their cares and perplexities to One who was so able and willing to relieve them. Our Lord graciously pointed out to them that the very circumstances which occasioned them so much distress, and had led them to doubt so often whether Jesus was the Christ, were the strongest proofs they could have had that He was indeed their long promised Messiah. He shewed them how plainly all the prophets had foretold that Christ was to *suffer*, before He could enter into His glory; and relieved and interested them so much by His divine discourse, that, when they arrived at Emmaus they pressed Him earnestly to become their guest, saying, "Abide with us; for it is towards evening, and the day is far spent."

E. And did our Lord remain with them?

M. Yes; though at first He had appeared as if He intended to go on, He entered into their house to tarry with them. Some, you know, like Abraham, by entertaining strangers, have "entertained angels un-

awares." But never was hospitality so rewarded as it was now. The supper table was spread; and the Son of God was the guest; and the supper became a Sacrament, a joyful Eucharist, a holy Communion. For "it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread and blessed it and brake it, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. And they said one to another, Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened the Scriptures?"

E. That is indeed an interesting account, Mamma: I hope they told the other disciples what had happened to them.

M. They immediately returned to Jerusalem, and told their brethren what had occurred; but the disciples still doubted; nor was it till they were told that He had appeared unto Peter, that they were brought to believe that the Lord was risen indeed. Then at length the apostles admitted the joyful truth, and listened to what the two disciples from Emmaus had to tell of our Lord's appearance to them. And while they were relating what had passed, "Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you!"

E. Oh now they will have no more doubts.

M. At first they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit; but their gracious and indulgent Master gently dispersed their fears, saying, "Why are ye troubled, and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have. And when

he had thus spoken, he shewed them his hands and his feet ;” inviting them to examine with their eyes, and to feel with their hands, that He had really flesh and bones, and that in His flesh were the wounds which the nails and the spear had made at His crucifixion. But joy made them still incredulous ; they wondered rather than believed. These things were, they thought, “but too happy to be true.” But happily for them they had to deal with a most compassionate Saviour ; who could make allowance for all their infirmities, who could pity their weakness, and who was ready to give them such proof as they could not doubt, of His real bodily presence among them, by asking for food and eating it before them. And now their joy was unmixed. They saw, believed, and were glad.

Having made Himself fully known to them, Jesus left with them His legacy of *Peace* : yes ; though Peter had denied, and all had forsaken Him, He gave them all the blessing of *Peace* ; thus comforting their hearts, and attaching them by the bonds of peace more than ever to Himself. He then gave the apostles a commission to instruct the world in the way of life ; that as He had been a Teacher sent from God, so they should be teachers sent from Him, having authority in like manner to send others also, to preach in His name remission of sins, and so to loosen or else to bind the consciences of men. And in order to enable them rightly to discharge so solemn a trust, He now gave them, as before His death He had promised, the gift of His Holy Spirit. For He breathed on them and saith unto them, “Receive ye the Holy Ghost : whosoever sins ye remit they are remitted ; and whosoever sins ye retain they are retained.”

There was absent, however, on this interesting oc-

casion one of the Apostles, whose name was Thomas. And when the rest told him that they had seen the Lord, he refused to believe it, unless he should himself see and feel that it was the very same body which had hung upon the cross; saying, "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe." So backward were the eleven to receive hastily those glorious facts, which form the foundation of our blessed religion! So sure therefore may we be of the truth of all that they in their writings have told us; seeing that they themselves did not believe these things until they were compelled to do so, by proofs which could not be doubted. We sometimes hear of enthusiasts; that is, people who take up very warmly certain views of things, and therefore fancy them to be right; believing to be true whatever they wish to be so. Now their faith is founded not in reason nor in evidence, but in their own feelings and affections. It was not so with the Apostles. What could be more welcome to them than to hear that Jesus was alive again? Yet how backward were they to believe it! although assured of it over and over again by different disciples, who had either been told the glad tidings by angels, or else had themselves seen and conversed with their risen Saviour. Even their own senses they doubted for a while. One proof was not enough for them: the proofs were "many and infallible," such as could not be resisted, before their unbelief was overcome. They had the fullest possible evidence for their own satisfaction before they began to preach *Christ Crucified and Risen* to the rest of mankind. It was in this spirit that St. Peter declared, "We have

not followed cunningly devised fables, but were eye-witnesses of his Majesty," that is to say on the Mount of Transfiguration: and so they were of His resurrection—eye-witnesses, and more than eye-witnesses: for as St. John says expressly in the beginning of one of his Epistles, "What they had seen with their eyes, what they had gazed upon and their hands had handled, that did they declare concerning the Word of Life," The fact is, the Apostles erred not on the side of an over easy faith, but the other way: they were too slow to believe what Christ had said, and what the prophets had foretold.

E. But this has been a good thing for us; has it not, Mamma?

M. Yes, our evidence for our religion is much stronger in consequence; and this is an instance, like others without number, of good brought out of evil by that gracious Providence which governs the world. But in the Apostles such backwardness of faith was not right.

E. Had Thomas any opportunity of judging for himself about our Saviour's Redemption?

M. Yes; our Lord mercifully granted him abundant evidence of the truth of what he had heard, whilst He at the same time reprov'd him for his unbelief. Eight days after His first appearance among the disciples, they were again assembled together, and the doors were shut, when suddenly, "Jesus stood in the midst and said, Peace be unto you. Then said he to Thomas," who was now amongst them, "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side, and be not faithless, but believing." It was a happy moment for Thomas:

his unbelief was at an end for ever: convinced at once both of the reality of our Saviour's resurrection, and of the divinity of His character, He exclaims, "My Lord and my God." He now saw and believed: he might indeed; for he had had proofs enough to have believed without seeing. So, remember, may we: and if we do believe from our hearts that Jesus, who died for our sins, did rise again from the dead, and now reigns as our Lord and God in heaven, we shall inherit the blessing which Jesus now pronounced on all who should hereafter believe in Him. "Jesus saith unto Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed."

See *Matt.* xxviii. 1—15. *Mark* xvi. 1—14. *Luke* xxiv. 1—43. *John* xx.



FIFTY-NINTH SUNDAY EVENING.

THE ASCENSION.

M. Our last conversation was on the subject of our Lord's resurrection, and of the various proofs which He was pleased to give to his disciples that He was risen indeed. Before we proceed, it will be well to observe on what day of the week our blessed Redeemer rose. Can you tell me?

E. It was not, I think, on the Jewish Sabbath, but the day after; that is the first day of the week.

M. And the day we call Sunday; which the church of Christ has from the beginning kept holy, instead of

the Jewish Sabbath, because on it the Saviour rose from the dead, and so rested from the work of our redemption, and blessed it with the blessing of peace, and hallowed it by making it the day of His triumph.

E. But then, Mamma, I do not understand how the fourth commandment bids us keep the *seventh* day holy. Is our first day that which was once the seventh?

M. We cannot say that it is, or that it is not so; though we feel that this may possibly be the case; as the day for the Jewish Sabbath was chosen, I believe, as being the day of their deliverance from Egypt. But by the seventh day in the commandment, we are to understand one day in seven, rather than the seventh day of the week, as reckoned from the Creation: that is to say, out of every week we should devote one day continually to the public service of God. In point of fact, there can be no *one* seventh day, nor any one first day, the same for the whole world. For you know, whilst the day begins with us in England at six o'clock, for instance, in the spring, it is closing in New Zealand, whilst at Calcutta it is noon day; and in some of the western states of America it is still midnight.

Thus in New Zealand, and even in New South Wales, the Sabbath must of necessity be kept a day later or a day earlier than with us; and in very few parts of the world can it begin exactly at the same time. The great thing then is, that we should keep the Sabbath in spirit and in truth; that is, we should truly keep a day of sacred rest, according to the spirit of God's holy commandment. We should keep it, as it has been kept, from the very first, in remembrance of

God our Creator; and also in remembrance, not, as the Jews did, of their deliverance out of Egypt, but, as our Lord and His apostles have taught us, of our deliverance from a far worse than Egyptian bondage, through the Resurrection of our Redeemer from the dead.

E. Is there, then, a new commandment in the Gospel bidding us to keep the first day instead of the seventh?

M. There is no express commandment. But we have the practice of the church from the first, to assure us that there was good reason for the change, which otherwise would not have taken place. The Apostles of Christ must have directed it so to be done, in obedience to His will; indeed we find the first day of the week repeatedly marked in the New Testament, as a day especially set apart under the Gospel for works of piety. And the great reason of this was, that on the first day our Lord arose, and appeared to Mary Magdalen, to Cleopas and his companion, then to Peter, and again in the evening of the same day to the disciples assembled at Jerusalem.

For a week afterwards the Gospel is silent. Then on the eighth day, that is on the next Sunday, our Lord appears again, on the occasion of which we spoke, when the unbelief of Thomas was removed. And thus it was that Sunday began to be, as it afterward continued to be, the Gospel sabbath, the *day of weekly remembrance* to the Church of Christ.

But we must go on with the history, which is now approaching rapidly to a close; continuing, as it has done all along, to increase in interest and importance, every step it takes. Our Lord had already appeared several times to the Apostles and others in and near

Jerusalem ; and probably all the disciples there were now fully persuaded of His return to life. But most of the followers of Christ were Galileans : it was in Galilee that He had chiefly taught. “The land of Zabulon and of Nephthalim, the way of the sea beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles,” was in this respect peculiarly favoured. We may hence, perhaps, see a reason why our Lord should vouchsafe to make His great public appearance in Galilee, where many believed on Him, rather than at Jerusalem where He had been despised and rejected ; especially as there were, no doubt, among His disciples many females and infirm persons, who had not come up to Jerusalem to the Paschal feast. Be this however as it may, certain it is, that it was in Galilee chiefly that our Lord promised before His death to appear when He was risen ; and there that He commanded His disciples to assemble, on a mountain which He had pointed out to them for that purpose.

E. Were there many disciples on that mountain then ?

M. The number of disciples altogether—of those I mean, who had been actually baptized as such, was probably not very great as yet ; but St Paul expressly says, that, after His resurrection, our Lord once appeared, and it was most probably on this great occasion in Galilee, to more than five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part were alive when the apostle wrote ; that is about twenty years afterwards ; and many perhaps lived much longer, to hand down to succeeding Christians, their testimony to the truth of the resurrection.

E. But did not our Saviour ever show Himself
[*Second Series.*]

to any but His disciples? Would it not have put His enemies to utter confusion, if they had seen Him again in the temple, instructing the people as He did before His death? Even the Scribes and Pharisees must have believed in Him then, I think?

M. Perhaps not, Edward. They who shut their eyes against His miracles, and their hearts against His goodness; who refused to hear Moses and the prophets, bearing their clear testimony to Him; neither would they have been persuaded, if He had gone to them from the grave. The heart that rejects such evidence as is sufficient to convince it, will as easily reject more. It is indeed remarkable, that it was the raising a man from the dead, that led these enemies of Christ to seek His death. You may recollect how the resurrection of Lazarus exasperated them. Besides, the Jewish rulers *had* undeniable evidence of our Lord's resurrection, in the testimony of the very guards, whom they had placed to watch His sepulchre. These soldiers, the moment they had recovered from the panic, into which they had been thrown by the earthquake and the appearance of the angel, went and told the chief priests what had occurred. But what was their conduct? They called a council and resolved, not to confess their crime and acknowledge the risen Messiah, but to bribe the soldiers with large presents of money, to utter a wicked and absurd falsehood,—to say that the disciples had come by night, and stolen Him away while they slept. A story which, if true, would have cost these poor men their lives; it being death to a Roman soldier to sleep when on duty. But the chief priests promised, if Pilate heard of it, to make such a representation of

the case to him, as should secure them from punishment.

E. I am sure, I would not have trusted them.

M. No; bad men cannot be trusted: we do not know however how this matter ended for the soldiers. As to the persecutors of Christ, it would have been unreasonable to expect that such persons should have been so highly favoured, as to see Him risen, whom, in despite of so much evidence, they were determined to reject. For what a blessed, what a glorious privilege it was, to be permitted to see the Saviour after His victory over death! What an abundant reward to those humble and sincere followers, who had faith to believe in Him in the days of His humiliation! who had shown themselves frail indeed, and at times slow of belief, yet honest and open to conviction! To such chosen witnesses, and not to all the people, (proud or humble, obstinate or candid,) did our Lord condescend to appear.

Yet observe, my child, that these chosen witnesses were not few; there were not one or two, who might possibly have been deceived, but five hundred brethren at once; and in particular, there were the eleven apostles, who had been our Lord's personal attendants all through His ministry, and could not be deceived as to His person.

When on this solemn occasion, the disciples saw the Lord, they fell down and worshipped Him, as the women had done before, when He appeared to them from the tomb. They worshipped their risen Saviour, and so did the apostles. And He permitted it—He who had once expressly said, “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.”

Thus the disciples had already learnt each one to say to Jesus, "My Lord, and my God." Some indeed, less instructed than the rest, might have doubted for awhile, whether Christ were really to be worshipped, were really God. But all such doubts must have given way when they heard our Lord say, "All power is given unto me, both in heaven and on earth;" and again, when they heard Him command His apostles, to "go and disciple the nations;" to bring them one and all into His school; baptizing them, not in the name of the Father only, but of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, both of these blessed Persons being together with the Father the object of our religious worship, the source of all our mercies. He bade them also teach all mankind to observe whatever He had taught them, and graciously promised, in the exercise of this holy ministry which He had given them, to be with them, and all who should succeed them in that blessed work, even unto the end of the world.

E. Did the Lord show Himself any more to the apostles after this?

M. Yes; whilst they remained in Galilee, He appeared to them as they were fishing on the sea of Tiberias, making Himself known to them by causing them to enclose a miraculous draught of fishes, such as you have heard of before, as if to remind them again of their calling, which they were soon to commence with great power and success, as fishers of men. And when they were come to land, He invited them to dine once more with Him, distributing to them with His own hands the bread and the fish. The Evangelist St. John has given us a beautiful account of a conversation which took place on this occasion,

between the compassionate Saviour and His poor fallen disciple Peter. In this discourse the Lord Jesus, in the most solemn yet tender and affectionate manner, reminded Peter of that sad night when he had denied Him, not upbraiding him with his ingratitude, but inviting him to feel that he was again restored to his Master's favour. Three times He put to him this touching question, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" How must that question have wrung the heart of Peter! reminding him, as it evidently did, of those three times when he had denied his suffering Lord.

E. I dare say he was afraid to answer, "Yes."

M. He was no doubt deeply distressed to think that his blessed Master should have had so much reason to doubt his love: but, happily for Peter, his own heart assured him that he did love the Saviour, and he was able to say, "Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee;" and at last, when grieved at the question being put to him a third time, to exclaim, in the sincerity of his soul, "Lord thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." Then, as if to accept the assurance of his love, and to raise the heart of His drooping disciple, by giving him a strong proof that He did so, the blessed Jesus committed to Peter a most solemn charge, in which He gave him a full opportunity of *proving* that love which he had now so warmly declared. To each assurance of affection, which Peter gave Him, Jesus replied, "Feed my sheep," or "feed my lambs."

E. I suppose that our Lord meant that he was to take care of His people, both young and old?

M. Yes: it is they who are spoken of by the Good

Shepherd as the sheep and lambs of His flock. These were now to be entrusted to the care of the apostles; who were to watch over them and feed them with the bread of life, to lead them in the green pastures, and by the still waters of the Gospel, and to be ready to perform the duty of Christian pastors in the midst of dangers and even of death. Thus would Peter have full opportunity of showing the reality of his affection for Christ; and so sincere was that love, that he did not shrink from the office assigned to him, although our Lord plainly forewarned him that it would lead to a cruel death, clearly pointing out that the death He Himself had suffered, the death of the cross, should be the death also of this attached disciple. He, who had once fled from the cross of his Master, would, hereafter, willingly for that Master's sake be stretched out upon the cross himself.

E. And was it so, Mamma?

M. We are told by the writers of our early Church History, that St. Peter suffered crucifixion a short time before the destruction of Jerusalem, and about thirty years after this our Saviour's last conversation with him. We are also told that He requested to be crucified with his head downwards, stating that he was not worthy to die in the same manner that his blessed Lord and Saviour died. What an affecting proof was here that the Apostle understood his own heart when he said, "Lord, thou knowest that I love thee!"

E. I think he is more to be envied than pitied, Mamma.

M. Indeed he is: for he loved a Master who can give eternal life, and abundantly reward His followers in heaven, for any sacrifice which they make for Him

here. The sacrifice in St. Peter's case was great; but the reward infinitely greater. What is the loss of a few days or years on earth, compared with an eternity in heaven! What the momentary agony of a cruel death, (should it be such,) when contrasted with joy without measure and without end!

E. And did the other Apostles die Martyrs also? or were our Lord's words addressed to Peter only?

M. The command to feed his flock was addressed, no doubt, equally to all the Apostles, who were all equal in office and authority: and, in the exercise of their office, all the Apostles were at times exposed to great sufferings and dangers. History tells us, that all but one suffered martyrdom; thus resembling more nearly their suffering Lord. One, however, was exempt, not indeed from suffering, nor yet from martyrdom, but he was exempt from a violent death.

E. What do you mean, Mamma? how could he escape a violent death, and yet suffer martyrdom? and of which of them are you speaking?

M. I allude to the disciple whom Jesus loved, St. John, who is said to have been thrown into a caldron of boiling oil, yet by a miracle escaped unhurt, as I once mentioned to you before. He lived to be above ninety years old, and died at length a natural death. It seems that St. Peter had been anxious to know what would become of this beloved disciple, and that he asked this question of our Lord, "Lord, and what shall this man do?" Our Saviour intimated in reply, that he should remain on earth till He Himself came; which made the disciples think that St. John was never to die. Our Lord, however, did not mean this; He was speaking not of His coming in glory

at the end of the world, but of His coming in vengeance to punish Jerusalem. Jerusalem was destroyed by Titus in the year 70; and John died in the year 100. So strictly was this prophecy fulfilled in the fact of St. John surviving so long all the rest of the Apostles.

After the appearance at the lake, our Lord was seen, as St. Paul mentions, by James, who became afterwards bishop of Jerusalem, and who is supposed, by some, to have been expressly appointed to that office by Christ Himself.

We have also an account of His final appearance to the Apostles at Jerusalem on the day of His ascension into heaven. Do you think you can tell me now of how many appearances of our Lord we have heard since His resurrection?

E. I think I can. Did He not appear

1. To Mary Magdalen.
2. To the other holy women.
3. To the disciples walking to Emmaus.
4. To Peter.
5. To the Apostles at Jerusalem on the first day of the week.
6. To the Apostles as they sat at meat when Thomas was with them; and that too was on Sunday.
7. In Galilee, on mount Tabor.
8. By the lake of Tiberias.
9. To James.
10. At His ascension into heaven.

Of this, Mamma, His last appearance, I hope you will tell me as much as ever you can.

M. Of that glorious event we have short, but deeply interesting, accounts given us in the Gospels of St.

Mark and St. Luke, and again in the Acts of the Apostles. It seems that having assembled His Apostles at Jerusalem, the Lord Jesus repeated His solemn charge that they should go and bear witness of Him unto the uttermost parts of the world. Then He led them out unto Bethany, unto the top of mount Olivet.

E. Ah, we have often heard of that mountain before.

M. It had been often hallowed by the Redeemer's presence¹. From the Mount of Olives he had shed His holy instructions, like refreshing dew, upon the hearts of His disciples. In the Mount of Olives He had spent whole nights in communion with His heavenly Father. From the Mount of Olives He had wept over Jerusalem : and in the Mount of Olives was that garden, where He had so often resorted with His disciples ; and which became at last the scene of that agony and bloody sweat, which brought an angel down to comfort Him. Yes ; the Mount of Olives is to us as a dear familiar place. We have known it as the Mount of teaching ; we have known it as the Mount of prayer ; we have known it on a high festal day become a Mount of weeping ; we have known it as the Mount of agony, but henceforth we shall know it as the Mount of glory.

Again, in this sacred spot, He renewed His instructions respecting the preaching of His Gospel, foretelling the wonders which should attend them in doing it. And then the Saviour lifted up His hands and blessed them for the last time. “ And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven ; a cloud receiving him out of their sight.”

¹ See Bishop Hall.

E. Our Lord did not go up then in a chariot of fire as His servant Elijah did ?

M. No; the Redeemer “needed neither chariot, nor carriage of angels;” for He is the author of life and motion, and all move in and from Him.” “A cloud received him out of their sight;” henceforth He was hidden from their view; nor could they tell how much of glory lay beyond that cloud. No eye could behold and no heart imagine what that cloud concealed. No human being was allowed to behold the glorious welcome which awaited the Incarnate God as He approached the blessed regions of immortality. But we have some idea given us of it in many parts of Scripture¹. In one place we are told that “God is gone up with a merry noise, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet:” in another sublime passage the inspired writer attempts to describe the joy that would prevail in heaven upon the return of the Redeemer. He allows us even to hear the voices of the angels announcing and rejoicing in His approach: he bids us listen while they sing, “Lift up your heads, Oh ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in.” St. Paul too gives us to understand that it was of Christ’s ascension into heaven that the Psalmist spoke beforehand, when he said: “The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even many thousands of angels: the LORD is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place. Thou hast ascended upon high; thou hast led captivity captive; thou has received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God (the Holy Spirit) might dwell among them.” This

¹ Bishop Hall.

was, indeed, the great triumphal procession of the Son of God, of which His public entry into Jerusalem was but a faint type or shadow. Now it was that He returned home from His conquests to the capital of His dominions, the heavenly Zion ; now that He was proceeding to the true Temple, His Father's house, with its many glorious mansions ; now, that He triumphed over His captive enemies, received gifts to distribute among His once rebellious subjects, and above all that chief of gifts, the gift of the Holy Spirit, which He shed so abundantly on His Apostles, and first converts, and sheds also upon us.

E. But the disciples must have felt sad, when the cloud concealed our Lord Jesus Christ from their view ; and when they felt that they now really should see Him again no more.

M. It must, indeed, have been a bitter bereavement to them : but they were not left without comfort. Out of the innumerable company of angels, who doubtless attended our Lord, two were spared to comfort and support those who were left behind. In the midst of His own Glory, the Lord remembered His disciples. When, indeed, had He forgotten them ? But this was as it were a peculiar assurance that He would be as mindful of them in that world, whither He was now gone, as He had always been here below. How full of comfort is this thought, not only for the Apostles, but for every sincere Christian to the end of the world ! How full of comfort to us, as well as to them, is the promise which those blessed beings gave to the looking, longing, loving disciples ! For “ as they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold two men stood by them in white apparel ; which also said,

Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye here gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." Here was comfort for the Apostles; and they were comforted: for they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and there waited for the coming of the Holy Ghost, according to the promise of Christ, to endue them with power from on high; spending the intervening time chiefly in the temple, in praising and blessing God for the glorious things which they had seen, and for the still more glorious prospects of which they were partakers. For their minds were at length opened to understand the real meaning of the prophecies contained in Scripture, and the true nature of their Master's kingdom: so that they could now rejoice in the midst of their trials, that, as for their Lord, He was in Heaven, safe and blessed for ever and ever; and that in due time He would do whatever pleased Him, for the success of His religion and for the happiness of those who should truly embrace it.

See *Matt.* xxviii. 16—20. *Mark* xvi. 15—20.

Luke xxiv. 44—53. *John* xxi.

THE END.



